

THE CHARM OF KASHMIR

"Hominum Divomque Voluptas"

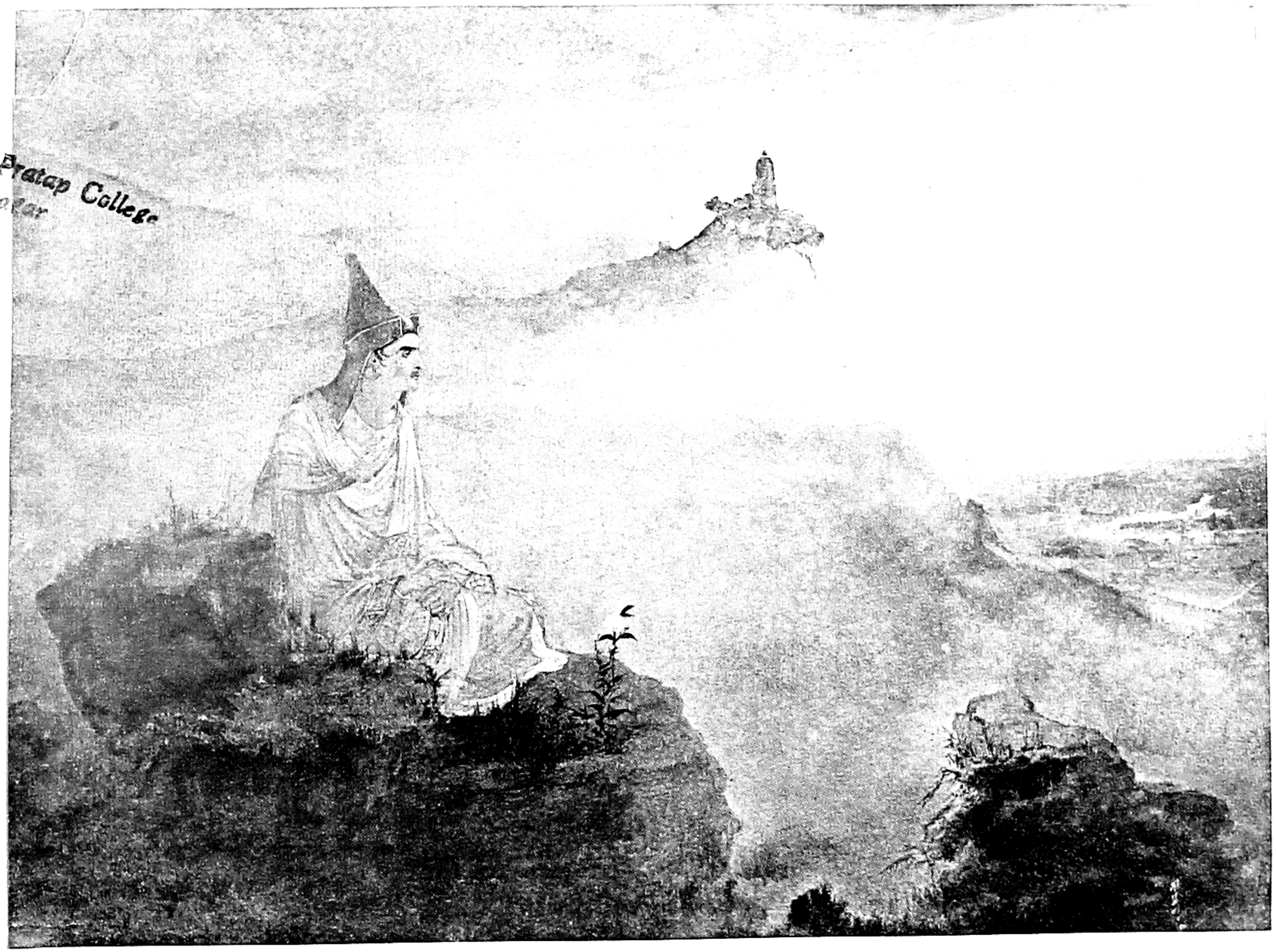
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THE SILKEN EAST: A Record of Life and Travel in Burma; in 2 vols.

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THE SCENE OF WAR.



ASOKA, WHO BY THE WHITE STUCCO OF HIS FAME MADE SPOTLESS THE UNIVERSE

THE CHARM OF KASHMIR

BY

V. C. SCOTT O'CONNOR

AUTHOR OF 'THE SILKEN EAST'

WITH 16 COLOURED PLATES AND
24 ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

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THIS BOOK IS
BY THE QUEEN'S GRACIOUS PERMISSION
DEDICATED TO HER MAJESTY

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NOTE

Quotations from Eastern poets such as Abu'l-Ala are for the most part taken from translations in "The Wisdom of the East" series.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Foreword: In this book an attempt is made to capture the charm of one of the acknowledged beauty-spots of the world; but charm is essentially an elusive quality, not easily trapped in a net of words. Pictures have therefore been added, and a brief introduction to those which embellish this volume may not be deemed out of place.

The place of honour will be rightly assigned to the paintings of Abanindro Nath Tagore, whose work as the founder and inspirer of the modern school of Indian Art at Calcutta, has attracted wide attention, not only in India, but in Paris, in London, and in New York. The grace, softness, and beauty of line which characterise his work speak for themselves; and the qualities of Vision and of Poetic insight which are displayed in the examples before us, require that they shall be considered as something more than mere Illustrations.

They are interpretations in colour of the soul of Kashmir in so far as it finds expression in these pages, and they depict something more than the external beauty that is acknowledged by the eye of every traveller in that exquisite country.

Next after these come the paintings of Mrs. Sultan Ahmad, Miss Hadenfeldt, and the late Colonel Strahan.

Colonel Strahan's work is well known in India. He was a great traveller, and his countrymen in India, many of whom treasure specimens of his skill with the brush, will be glad to see some of them included in this volume.

Miss Hadenfeldt has spent the last five years in the Happy Valley, and she is intimately familiar with its scenery and characteristics. The decorative beauty of her pictures, made specially to illustrate the text, will appeal to all who know the country and take pleasure in originality and freshness of outlook.

Mrs. Sultan Ahmad's pictures fall into another category. Like Abanindro Nath Tagore, she would reach the spirit that lies hidden behind the

glow of colour and the splendour of the world in Kashmir. In the two pictures she has contributed to this volume, there stand revealed the lustre of Day, when the world is going about its business; and the mystery of Night, when the dark Canals are veiled in shadows. They are symbolic of the East, where Life and Death jostle each other, and Secrecy and Candour go hand in hand.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

COLOURED PLATES

FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

NOTE

Half of these plates are from photographs taken by the Author; for the rest he is indebted to the kindness of Miss Aurilla Boyer; to Messrs. Shorter, Bremner, and Vernon; to the Kashmir State; and to the Thomason College.

"This Land in the womb of Himalaya."

KALHANA.

"The most delicious spot in Asia or in the World."

ELPHINSTONE.

"The Paradise of the Indies."

FRANÇOIS BERNIER.

"Learning, lofty houses, saffron, icy-water and grapes: things that even in Heaven are difficult to find, are common there." . . .

"And the sun shines mildly there even in summer, in this place created by Kashyapa as if for his glory."

KALHANA.

"Its flowers are enchanting and fill the heart with delight. Violets, the red-rose, and the wild narcissus cover the plains. Its Spring and Autumn are extremely beautiful."

ABUL FAZL.

"The valley to the Kashmiris was a rock-bound prison from which escape was difficult. The great snow-mountains suggested nothing to them beyond the hopelessness of flight from tyranny."

SIR WALTER LAWRENCE.

"All the people I send into Kashmir turn out rascals; there is too much pleasure and enjoyment in that country."

RANJIT SINGH.

THE CHARM OF KASHMIR

PRELUDE

(I)

THE 24th of April, and I find myself on the road to Kashmir. For a thousand miles my journey lies across the plain of India, that spreads here like a sea. Somewhere above me upon the northern Horizon, there climbs towards Heaven, the mighty wall of the Himalaya, yet hidden as completely from sight, as though it had never been. A traveller who came here at this season might see all of India, and yet leave it unaware of the greatest mountains in the world. So easily are Facts concealed.

How smooth too and level is this plain! as though Nature having exhausted her constructive purpose in the building of the mountains was content to lie idle at their feet in the negation of all further effort. No incident breaks its level monotony; and at this season of the year it is white with dust, and grey with the desolation of Asia.

White columns of dust drive like the phantoms of a dying world along it's highways; and a cloud of dust hangs like a shroud over the fields and cities. In the vague distance one can trace, as in a dream, the faint outlines of a City; the walls and towers of some Feudal stronghold, or Caravan-Serai of the Emperors; for it was here along this track that they pursued their way, with a pomp and splendour unsurpassed in the history of the World, from the Imperial Capital to their secluded vale of Kashmir.

Nearer at hand, where the veil of light and incandescent dust is less intense, one can glimpse a few pictures of the life of the people who inhabit this strange world; pictures of Ruth gleaning in the shorn fields, of cattle feeding in the stubble, of a flock of sheep following their shepherd in a

cloud of separate dust, as one sees them on the heat-ridden plains of La Mancha or Castile; and nearer still, of Persian wheels droning their music of toil, and splashing their crystal waters in the vivid sunlight, under the shelter of tree Oases, green as nothing else is, by favour of THE WELL. At the Railway Stations through which the trains pass, over metals whose unbending directness and iron devotion to the service of these people are symbolic of the race which now governs India, one sees the people clustered, waiting for carriage, visibly rejoicing in the abundant flow of free and pure water that sparkles and foams at the taps. The key-note of the scene is THIRST, and the whole world here would die, and the trains would cease to run, and men would vanish from this surface of the earth, as they have vanished from other once populous centres of Asia, were it not for the subterranean flow which the wells reveal, and for the mighty rivers, which wander hungrily over these spaces that even they cannot fill.

Thirst and Heat and the Desolation of Asia!

Who coming here would suspect that within a hundred miles of all this weariness and dun monotony, there hangs, halfway as it were 'twixt heaven and earth, the freshest and most lovely valley in the World? Yet in the white glare, we cross the very waters of that river whose birth-place and vernal youth are in that valley; the River of so many conquerors since Alexander, of so many poets, since he who sang in far-off Rome of the fabulous Hydaspes.

* * *

In the early dawn we are on the road to the Mountains, each moment nearer to us, as the swift Daimler swallows space; and in half an hour from the Railway, we are caught in the sinuous toils of the Foot-hills. It is a road flanked in its lower courses by golden corn-fields and green avenues of trees, and trodden by guns and infantry and cavalry on the march, and fine upstanding men and splendid women. Here we are in the cradle of a martial breed, the heirs of centuries of invasion and war. The men are virile with lithe erect bodies and a direct gaze; some harnessed to the business of war in the Empire's khaki and scarlet, others sickle in hand, bending to the wind-blown corn, tying their sheaves of gold, or cracking their

carters' whips along the white highway. And the women are good to look upon, straight of feature, erect as lances, full-bosomed and stately to the world.

(II) DOMEL

When we drove up to the staging bungalow and I looked down upon it, embroidered in pink roses and half-hidden under trees, by the shores of the rushing Jhilam whose great music filled the valley, it took my heart so, that I wished to stay here and bring my journey to an end; and now that I must go forward, since life is but a journey, I leave it with a pang of more than passing regret. For the place is one of a sweet and intimate beauty, yet upon the edge of great world-forces; of an ancient river whose fame was spread over the world when the world was still young and had an ear for mysteries, and of a line of mighty mountains, 'the Abode of Snow'; the manifest VALHALLA of the Gods.

Late last night when the silver clouds had dispersed and the Moon shone in the high vault of Heaven overhead, I stepped into the garden whose paths were soft with the fallen lilac bloom, and dappled with shade and light, and I walked for an hour by the high stone terraces, and down the stairways, and along the rose-hedges, whose clustering pink coloured the night and filled it with their soft unobtrusive perfume; and so to the great retaining wall which fronts the threatening river, and keeps it at bay, as do the great cliffs opposite. All night its vast susurrus of music passed through my sleep like the distant tones of an organ, and I slept at peace.

And now in the morning with the clouds of yesterday all fled, and the sky very blue over the valley, it is hard, as I have said, to leave this exquisite and fragrant spot; which without its eastern glamour might be a Pyrenean valley, or a meeting-place of waters in the Tyrol; as at Brixen, where the rivers rush and mingle and the felled timber floats with a mad buoyancy upon the raging tide.

I have walked under the chintz-like bloom and delicate foliage of the Indian Lilacs, which make long avenues here, and I have listened to the voices of innumerable birds, ringing with the amorous ecstasies of Spring.

Here is Nature abounding with life and creative purpose; and the flights of cheerful starlings, the half-silent and elusive dayals, the little garden-warblers, convey the same sense of a prolific and out-pouring Life, that the roses do, falling upon each other in their thousands, drooping over the railings and fences and the cut-stone walls, half-hiding an English homestead, and blooming in their prolific abundance even upon the gables and walls of this Posting House, as though they would lure the traveller to dally by the way side, and take his share of the joy of life.

Domel—the mingling of two—bears this elemental name, because the Jhilam and the Kishengunga meet here; and it needs little imagination to understand why amongst all primitive people the union of waters is a mingling of the Gods. For here are passion and might, the out-pouring of life, the symbolic act of creation. Standing here in the sun-light, on the low grassy shore of the Jhilam by the suspension bridge, one can see it coming exultantly along with the strength of many lions, dashing with its masculine beauty and joyousness into the laughing vivid Kishengunga; and thence rushing on for a space shoulder to shoulder with her but still apart, till a little further under the cliffs, their waters mingle and the streams become one.

One sees from here so many things that quicken the imagination; the statue of the God there graven in stone upon the pillars of the bridge; the grey and grim old Mogul Serai, with its grand air and lofty Porte, where the Emperors encamped—in marked contrast with the domestic English peace and beauty of the Bungalow; the sunlight gleaming upon the white houses of Mozufferabad as upon some hill-town of Italy, the blue mountains and shining lustre of snow, the wild pomegranate, red as the lips of Anarkali, and the Oleander her lover made his horsemen wear in their plumes as they marched up the valleys to Kashmir.

And yet when all is said, the sentiment of this place is neither of India, nor of Asia, nor of any named corner of the world; but just of one of those fragrant and exquisite spots where waters meet, and birds sing, and flowers bloom, and trees are heavy with shade, and the seclusion is unbroken by grace of the high encompassing mountains.

(III) GARHI

Thirteen miles along the Jhilam river, through lilac avenues that shimmer and meet overhead, bring one to an Elysian haunt, known as the Bungalow of Garhi. But here I had a singular conviction that I had dropped into a corner of old France. This was after I had breakfasted, and fell a dreaming in the secluded garden, where a round table stood in the centre, laden with the lilac drift. There was an outer circle of wooden benches ranged about it, one of which was crimson with the fallen petals of a Rambler—Nature's *pot-pourri*—while other Roses drooped in luxuriant bloom, their burden with difficulty upheld by wooden props. Their perfume filled the garden with its richness, and was blown by the breezes over the walls to the high road along which the world passed on its way. A young Plane tree—the first of the Kashmir *chinars*—flung her deep and abundant shade over a part of the house, and made of her grace a lovely portal to the garden. Outside, the green bare Pyrenean forms of the mountains towered into the sky on one hand, while upon the other the river, unseen but heard, like the murmur of the wind, flowed upon its destined way. Upon every branch of the Lilac trees, and in the Rose bushes, there was a bird singing with all the joy of spring in his throat, and anon the great Ravens came and flung their sombre shadows over the garden, and broke its music of wind and water and song with their loud sinister notes. In the Pyrenees, I remembered, each of them is still believed to embody the soul of a departed Saracen. . . .

It was of France as I have said that this garden, run to weed a little, exuberant with its own abundant fertility, full of whispers of summer days and fading roses, somehow reminded me.

There were I noticed wild strawberries growing about the benches amidst the clover; there were mulberries and figs and a cypress tree, while the hollyhocks clustered like a nursery of children about the knees of the table, touching its very rim; and there was an old dog who came along unobtrusively wagging his tail and lay down in the clover and the lilac drift, meekly thankful for anything I had to give him.

I was so pleased with the soft summer airs of this garden, and its note as of a place haunted with tranquil memories, that I sat very silent in it,

and half closed my eyes the better to learn its character; and I must have done so for some minutes, when an old woman in a check apron, with a handkerchief over her silvery hair, and wooden shoes to her feet, came down the pathway under the plane tree and wished me a good day.

"And where," I said, "is Monsieur?"

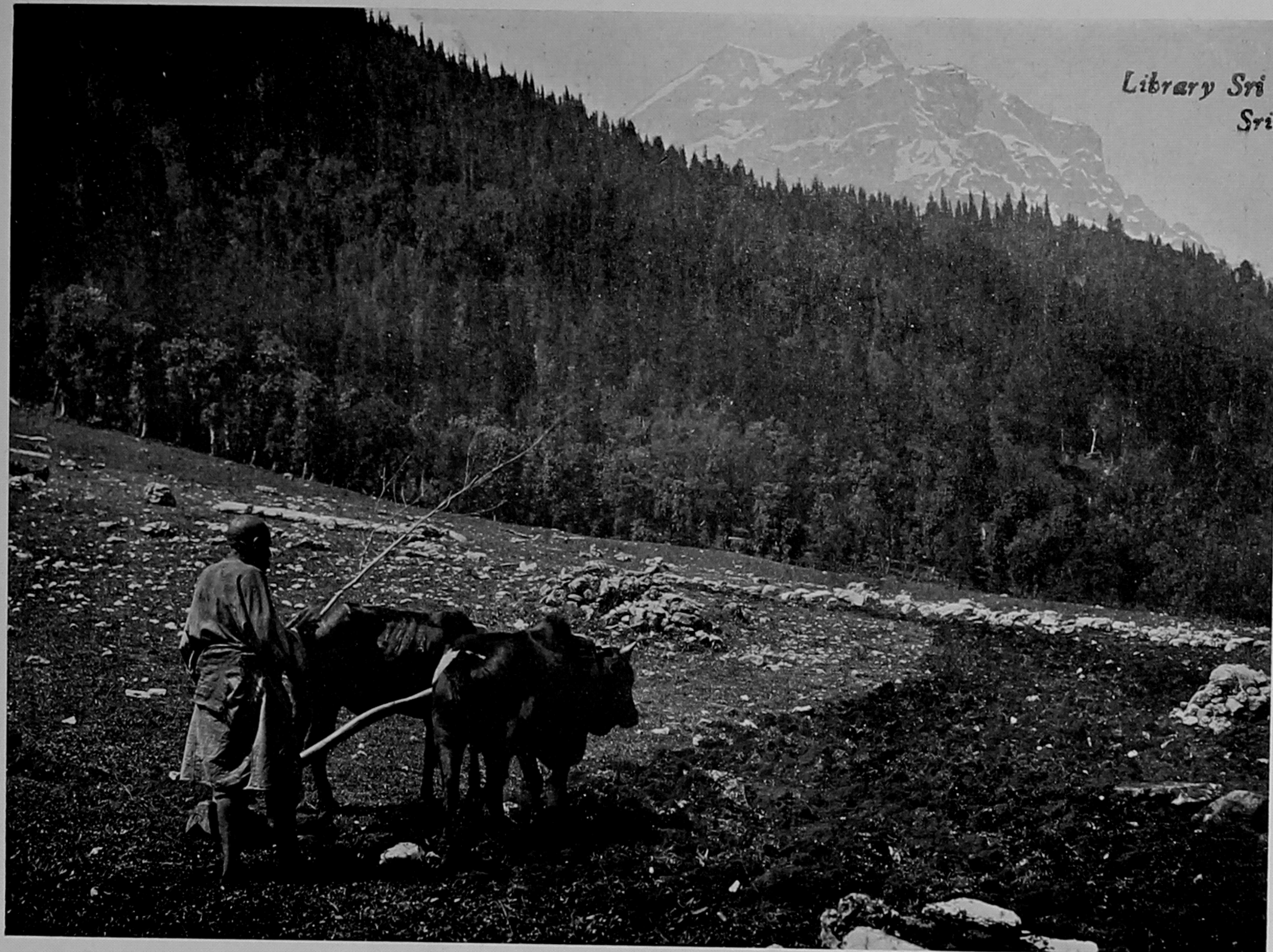
"*Monsieur*," she said softly, and yet with a touch of fire in her voice, "*est à la guerre*," and with this she looked wistfully about her at the fallen petals and the shadow of neglect that lay upon the garden. "*Mais la patrie . . . la patrie, Monsieur . . .*" and with this her voice broke and she could say no more. Upon which I awoke, for I must have slumbered in these moments stolen from a day of travel,—to find the driver standing beside me, with his battered bugle and professional air, and a suggestion that we should go upon our way.

(IV) URI

At Uri I passed the night. The Post-House here was less charming perhaps than those at Garhi or Domel. There was no secluded garden here, the roses were less abundant, and the season being later at this elevation, for we had climbed two thousand feet from Domel, they were not yet in bloom. The high stern mountains, the river rushing far down in the narrow valley, the freshness and verdure of the meadows and the fields, intersected by channels of water; all these took me back to Spain and Andorra; and the snow-spangled summits of the greater mountains might have been those I looked upon one summer day when first I entered the little Republic.

But how different is the temper of the people! There they would die rather than yield up their pride and their independence of a thousand years; here they are a people whose spirit, crushed under centuries of misrule, is only now timidly lifting its head from the dust.

I walked for an hour in the village lanes, and passing a lovely chinar tree, came to a new mosque that was nearly completed for prayer. Here I met the Maulvi and some Elders who invited me to enter and look within. Built of timber and stone, with carved windows of arabesque designs that linked with their subtle harmonies this little village chapel with the perfection of the Generalife, it was of two stories, with a slight inner stair-



SPRING IN THE UPLAND VALLEYS.

case leading from the one to the other; the one I was told for use in summer, the other in winter. The timber was a free gift from the Maharajah, who, with a true Hindu feeling, has a soft heart for all religions; and the labour, save that of the Master Builder, had been given as of love by the Moslems of the valley; so that the mosque has cost them very little in money. Its design was charming and very happily adapted to its mountain environment. It took the place of an older mosque, which had died of age, and its very foundations were set amidst the earthen graves of bygone generations.

"I have seen just such a Mosque in use amongst the Mussulmans of China," I observed; and they wondered at their Faith being spread so far abroad; and with that note of communal affection which is so characteristic of Islam, they asked:

"And are they well entreated by the King of China?"

I replied that it might be so now; but that in the past they had suffered much persecution. Whereupon they shook their heads sadly, as those not unacquainted with sorrow, and said gratefully enough:

"It is not so under the benign rule of our Emperor of London. Since you came here our Fate has changed, and our Religion, our Lands, and our Women have been left inviolate. We know well to whom we owe this change, and we are grateful."

As I walked on by a little stream, under a hedge of young poplars, I came upon an Ancient, a visiting Saint from the capital; one of those devout but seemingly idle people, for whose existence there seems so little justification in the pages of a statistical work; yet it occurred to me that this man's presence might well bring with it something of a benediction; for his mien and voice were gentle, and his large dark eyes shone with humanity. Here I observed was no fanatic of Islam; but a timid old Philosopher, with the heart of a child.

In the rice-fields here and there, in its lordly beauty and isolation, stood a chinar tree, mighty of girth and old at its base, but satin-bodied and young above, with its wealth of drooping foliage.

"It was there," said the Saint, "when I was a child and as high and as big as it is now. It belongs to another and a bygone age and was planted by some dead Sultan."

A boy of nine or ten—though he could make no guess at his age—spoke to me of his heart's ambition to become a public servant.

" What would you like to be ? " I enquired.

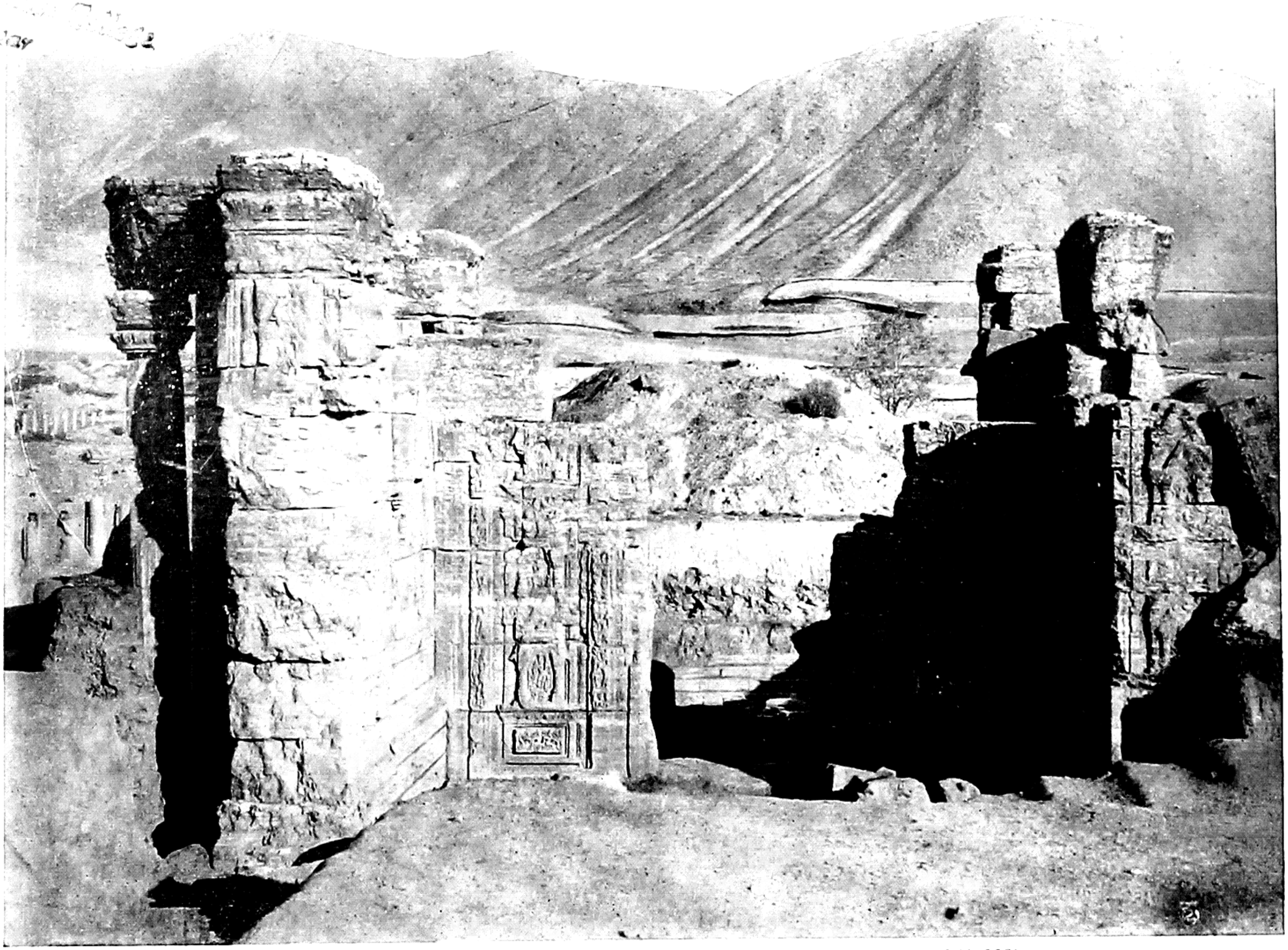
" Ah ! " he said with a singular sweetness and beauty of expression, such as you might look for on the face of a young girl dreaming of the unknown lover—" I cannot tell ! "

If his mother when she bore him was as beautiful as he, with his lustrous eyes, and deprecatory air, and finely-cut features, she must have been a joy in his father's eyes.

At Uri the morning broke fresh and exquisite, with the crisp freshness of mountain air ; and the world shone new-minted after recent rain. While the horses were being brought up, I walked upon the village green, where the ardent golfer drives his first ball in Kashmir. It was set about with English cottages and slim Poplars, and over it was a sky of blue, and upon all the circle of the valley there were mountains, enclosing in their dark and sunlit folds, white gleaming shapes of snow. One of these shone above the old Fort of Uri and its loopholed walls, another loftier and of a keener gleam looked over the valley of the river towards Kashmir. Under the rising sun there was a wide expanse of rock-hewn peaks and soft billowing fields of snow ; and behind me the river plunged on its way to sea. The crystal clearness of the air, the emerald freshness of the grass, the wonderful sensation of a world upborne in security and peace, were such as one may enjoy in a mountain land alone, when the winter is over and gone and the voice of spring is calling in the valleys.

* * *

From Uri one soon passes into the fellowship of the great mountains, with their blue forests of Deodars and their high and mighty cliffs of Basalt, which rise from the swirling river like the breast-works of a Titanic world. From afar off through the sequestered gloom of deep gorges, there descend in white foam, as in a dream, long waterfalls, and at their base spread velvet meadows and camping grounds under the shade of the Cedar trees. In the midst of these wonders of nature, whose gigantic character alone would impress the imagination, one is suddenly confronted with the first of the classical temples of Kashmir.



RUINS OF THE TEMPLE OF AVANTISVAMI-VISHNU AT AVANTIPURA (A.D 854–883).

It stands by the wayside, where from immemorial days the world has passed; and its beauty impinges upon one with the clear flash and sword-stroke of the human brain. It is so small a thing in its environment; yet it dominates all, as a beam of light in a great chamber. It has many graces of colour and form, and time has laid its hand upon it, softening its lines and yielding up to it some of the wistfulness of the departed centuries; but its principal quality is that which descends to it from the Greek genius. That is unmistakeable.

How, or by what wondrous paths, the Hellenic spirit inspired these early buildings in this far-withdrawn valley is something of a mystery; but that it did inspire them, no man can doubt.

The spirit of Islam, the worship of the One God, which have given us so much that is clear and sublime and touched with emotion, the Pagan fecundity of Hinduism which has lavished its skill upon a thousand intricacies of carving, and created generations of craftsmen; the Roman grandeur of our own great bridges, which hold in their iron grasp the passion of our Indian rivers, these are things familiar upon the face of the Indian Peninsula; but it is here, unexpectedly, in the mountain fastnesses, that one is met by this sudden and overwhelming claim of the Hellenic mind. Even in this its derivative form, it seizes upon one here, and gives this little wayside temple, lordship over all the majesty of the hills.

BOOK I

THE VALLEY

CHAPTER I

THE WATER GATE

BARAMULLA is the one exit for the waters of Kashmir, the cleft in the mountains which emptied the valley of its Lake and so gave birth to its varied beauty. It is thus one of the dramatic gateways of the world; and no man can pass down the still waters of the river—the classic Vitasta—of a summer evening, to the point at which its life is suddenly accelerated like a tragic crisis in a quiet life, without being deeply moved by the spectacle; but the approach to it from below is unimpressive. One enters it as it were through an antechamber which is called by the people 'Little Kashmir.' The cliffs of basalt, the dark pointing forests of Deodar which seize and impress the imagination at Rampur, are left behind, and the landscape falls to level and quiet spaces, with the river running like a domestic creature even with the cultivated fields; while willow trees and poplars line the road, and alders and elms the waterways. There is no sudden gorge or break in the low bare hills, and one's entry into the Valley might pass unnoticed were it not for the splendid gleam of Haramukh beyond, the manifest outpost of a greater world.

But there is one moment of a wonderful transition that no one, I suppose, can ever forget, and it comes on passing from the dust, the toil, and the clang of the hundred and seventy miles of mountain-road upon which one has travelled, to the cool seclusion of one's boat, and its soft gliding movement over the satin face of the river.

Here is something that is unlike any other locomotion in the world. A rustle at the prow alone tells of the resisting stream.

The view expands as the great mountains, white with snow at their summits, and spangled with silver at their lesser elevations, come into vision.

The colours are blue and white on the mountains, brown and green upon the lower hills, green on the meadows as upon any towing path in England, and the water is dun under keel, and a mirror for lovely things ahead.

Yet it is not always beautiful, for upon the lower river, monstrous buildings of tin and iron, shapeless and shameless in their ugliness, have been built by the engineers; masses of debris dredged from the bottom make ungainly piles upon the shores; and the electric wires which carry power up the valley are a blot upon the immemorial landscape.

But the river, serene and peaceful, and unconscious of the turmoil that lies before it in throttling defiles, moves on its way to the Indian plains —"wide as the Tigris at Mosul." It seems unconscious, but the people say that it is well aware of its destiny; that it lingers because it will not part with the loved valley of its birth, and that the turmoil at its gates is the symbol of its passionate grief at parting.

Upon the mountain tops there are fantastic clouds which dream and die and come to life again, beneath a sky of blue. Upon the low edge of the world where land and water meet, there are long lines of green poplars with a glint of white, and majestic chinars of a beauty that is royal in its stateliness. Anon there is a village with its tattered houses and more stately mosque or Ziarat, there are buffaloes and black cattle by the water, people calling to each other, the daughters of the soil husking rice, parties of travellers in small boats making across from shore to shore—withal, a placid, dreamy peace.

When the towing cord is taut and the passage way is clear, you feel as if the boat might go on for ever without an effort, but you soon learn that below the tranquil surface there lies no artificial water, but a live thing that lives and moves, with moods and passions of its own. You are travelling up a sheltered water such as trackers love, when upon a turn the boat is caught in the swift racing current and all is changed to animation; or again it must cross from one bank to the other, and, in spite of six rowers and polemen, it can only make the further shore at a point far below that from which it set out.

As the day reaches its close, you move your chair to the roof of the boat, whence your eyes travel without an effort over three-fourths of the horizon.

What a circle of beauty it is! with the rosy light flushing the brows of Haramukh and other giants of the world, and a moonlike whiteness on the snow-fields and peaks which face away from the sun. The green towing-path is grooved by the passing footsteps of the trackers, and the spacious fields lie spread like a table under the Heavens.

The river itself is the haunt of grey and purple shadows and of lustrous bands of colour; red and green under the banks, silver and opal in mid-water, flaming pink and gold.

Long after the white snow-fields up in the mountains are wrapped in sleep, the high peaks glitter like sword-edges, and the scheme is one of some far north world. The boat moves so peacefully along the water that it forms as it were an integral part of the landscape.

A pair of Bulbuls come to perch upon its roof and play at love, a Willy-wagtail climbs up here to walk with dainty footsteps along the edge of the carved railings. Here and there a Heron stands mirrored in the water, a duck flies swiftly across the darkening sky. The groves resound to the closing music of doves, the chatterings of sleepy sparrows.

This seems to be the hour loved by the birds. The sensation it yields is one of an unmeasured peace and a world remote from care. You would think that no one who lived here had ever a grief or a pain, and that at Death men passed insensibly here into the bosom of Nature.

The colours which so please one's eyes are soft in their appeal; a harmony of grey and silver and lavender; but the flush of sunset on the peaks towards Nanga Parbat is an exquisite rose, and behind them, in response to some final message from the sun, there break out into the sky long sudden fans of violet light or shadow.

Then the full-orbed moon emerges from behind those same peaks, that were rosy a moment ago and are now already sad and grey. Her radiant form is bright with the gold of the departed sun, and twice her accustomed size when sailing through the sky.

Did those violet shafts know that the moon was about to rise?

Hear the mysterious singing of the air, the delicate tremolo of the cricket, and the ripple of the rudder in the silent water!

At eight o'clock the world has become Arctic, yet with the warmth and glow of an English summer night under a harvest moon.

Long after sleep had fallen upon it save for the patient trackers who, like yoked cattle, pulled in silence by the shore, I sat on under the high moon, lost in the beauty of the night. So bright was her gleam that the snows upon the mountains were imaged in the waters; yet so faintly that they looked like some lost pattern in the waters themselves.

No sound broke the incomparable stillness of the night.

Save for the ascending Moon and the scarcely visible progress of the boat, the world seemed at pause, transfixed with wonder at her own loveliness.

> "It seemed as if the hour were one
> Sent from beyond the skies,
> Which scattered from beyond the sun
> A light of Paradise."

When I could no longer endure the poignancy of this scene, I went below and sat by the Moorish windows of my boat, and felt more of kin there with the beautiful things of the night. These little windows, I reflected, were made for lovers and frail beings, who would forget here in the laughing moonlight on the water, and its gleam upon the fretted arabesques of roof and wall, upon crimson silken curtains and human forms, the relentless march of time; the passing in their stately pageant of the Universal Gods.

I slept well, but more than once I woke as though summoned by some invisible messenger to go and look once more upon the divine perfection of the night.

CHAPTER II

THE WULAR LAKE

When I rose in the morning we were slowly gliding into the Wular; the greatest of all the lakes of Hindustan. The surface of its waters was embroidered with lilies, which here and there the early folk were collecting into their dark canoes as food for their cattle. The Lake spread vastly before us, of a radiant blue, and as we moved across it, the snowy masses of the Pir Pantsal behind us slowly lengthened out into a mighty array and wall of glittering snow. Beyond them, somewhere upon their farther side, there lay the plains of India in the grip of a demoniac summer. Yet was it hard to believe that they still existed, so complete was the transition to this magic vale.

Oh! the warm vital sunlight! the incomparable freshness of the morning air, the blue and silver of the mountains, and the rippling sheen of the lake!

Here upon this sunlit morning, on the last day of April, I found the perfection of idleness. The sun's warmth was tempered for me by a *shamiana* awning which left the view untrammelled, and the swinging of the boat brought every phase of the horizon in succession into sight. The near water was carpeted with the soft green and red leaves of the Singara, and the snow and purple of the mountains on the north were mirrored in the satin surface of the lake. Upon it moved with a solemn and stately progress the Dungas with their pent roofs, like gigantic hay-stacks in the illusion of sky and water, and the light *shikaras* that carried the village folk about their affairs. Far across the unruffled waters I could hear the voice of a man singing from very lightness of heart, and the murmur of mingled voices came to me from a hamlet under the giant wall of the mountains.

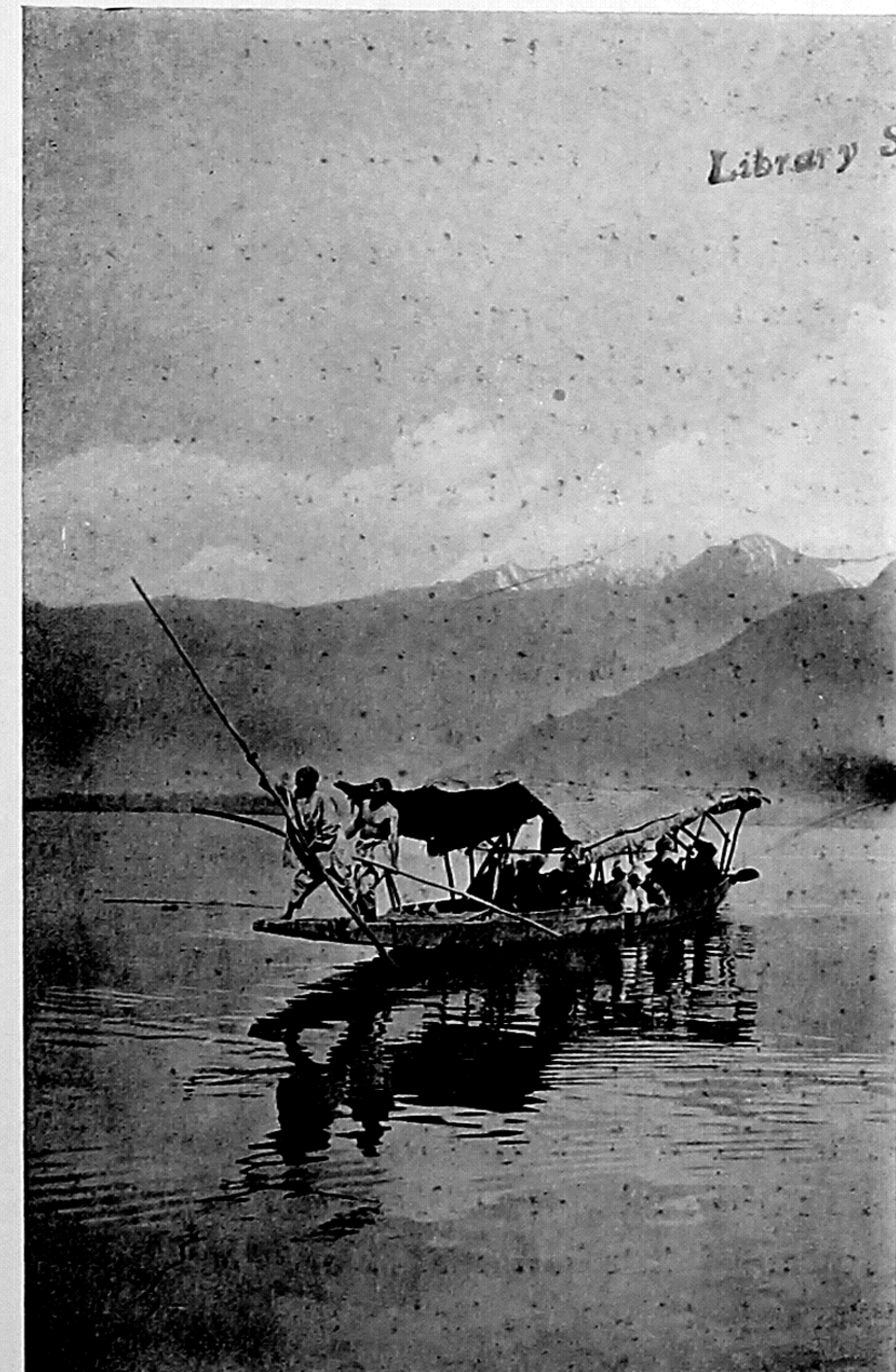
Towards noon, as the boat neared the end of her voyage across the Lake, every feature of these mountains was doubled in the lily-embroidered waters,

and my eyes travelling from the reflection to its source, rested with a feeling of kinship on the green fields and homesteads, where the great valleys falling precipitously from the snows, soften to shelving fans and spaces of land fit for human subsistence. Upon many such as these I had looked in other years from the edge of Garda and Leman, but all there is known and frequented and a little worn with use; whereas here these hamlets and homesteads slumber on like Nature herself, unconscious and nameless to the outer world. No tourist steamer here ruffles in its daily transits the calm of the waters, the lily tapestry, the immemorial stillness. Here the wild duck still wings her flight, the heron makes her home, and those who would cross the waters must ply their oars. Here is life in its simplest form; the life of the East.

At this far end as one nears the shore the waters shallow, and acres of reeds make green fields on the Lake, leaving only here and there a winding pool, or passage-way for the boats. At such places the ducks and the water-fowl shelter, and the reed-sparrows chatter, and new earth is slowly brought into being for the plough. Upon the green meadows, level as by the shores of Brook in Vaterland, where the Dutch cows feed, there are herds of cattle and horses, and whinnying foals, and lambs; and here, willows grow, flinging their shadows on the pools, and ever as we move the white mountains behind us stand up more and more in all the pride and glory of their high estate, and the great white circle which hems in this secluded world like a diadem, becomes increasingly manifest. So vast are its snow-fields, so lofty its summits white with eternal ice, that even in the full noon-light of this summer day, they carry with them a chilling and cold suggestion. Neither Leman, where its white mountain shines above the waters of Geneva, nor Garda, where its purple cliffs are mirrored in the blue of the once Austrian shore, nor any other of our great and beautiful lakes in Europe, has anything to show by comparison with this Titanic circle.

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At this north end of the lake, whence the Gilgit Road may be seen winding its way in sharp diagonals up the mountains to some of the highest lands in the world, a canal or passage, separated from the lake on either side



POLING ON THE WULAR.



THE SHEPHERD'S DAUGHTER.

by a narrow strip of grass, marks the entry of the Jhilam into its bosom, and so changes the character of our progress. The long poles are put away and the polemen wade ashore with the towing line. The grassy margins are the haunt of flocks of sheep and cattle and ponies, and amphibious and level is the earth with these pastoral incidents to give it character. The canal itself is a sinuous, winding creature, as natural in its beauty as any other feature of the landscape. In these shallows the grey Herons, whose plumes were once sought after by Emperors and great noblemen, whose flight was pursued by their falcons upon many a sunlit morning, now live at peace; yet, still mindful of those days, alert and suspicious of every passing boat.

It is the secret of the charm of Kashmir that it combines these homely and pastoral scenes that might be taken from an English valley, with a landscape that dazzles the eye with its majesty, and fills the mind with its records of a splendid past. And how happily, notwithstanding the great mountains, and those memories of departed greatness, one's eyes rest upon the humble meadows scarcely raised a foot above the water; these ruminant herds at peace; that field of mustard, spread like an embroidered coverlet of green and gold at the foot of the mountains, the very air scented by its bloom as we pass along its borders!

Here, as the waters wind through hamlet and village, are children at play, and women with their babes, and old men basking in the kindly sun; the Maulvi or village saint with his white beard and rosary and fastidious gait; the weaver by his washing pool. Here is the crooning of doves, the crowing of cocks, the singing of rowers as a marriage party speeds upon its way; here are young lambs that skip upon the meadows under the mulberry trees, while women pole and track, and even little children of five harness themselves joyfully to the towing cords. Here is the tomb of a prophet with its purple Iris bloom, and the village headman's house with its projecting oriels and grace and ornament, and here are the humbler tenements, each a legible picture of the simple life of the people.

"Soon as the evening shades prevail,
The moon takes up the wondrous tale,
And nightly to the listening earth,
Repeats the story of her birth;
While all the stars that round her burn
And all the planets in their turn
Confirm the tidings as they roll,
And spread the truth from pole to pole."

CHAPTER III

NIGHT AT MANASBAL

As the evening came I left the boat to pursue its tranquil course along the winding river, and took a path across the meadows through orchards and by quiet waters, till I came upon Manasbal, buried deep below the fields, an amethystine pool of water that took my breath away with its very loveliness. Upon its further shore there is the hill of Ah Tung, a solitary outwork upon the plain, and the Lake wanders northwards into a cleft in the mountains, whose purple walls and snowy gleam from a far interior are imaged in the waters, as still and deep as though time and incident were unknown to them.

Two small boats lay upon its surface ; one that was carrying some travellers from the Lake to the River ; another with a woman at the helm, and a man fishing at the prow. The travellers passed on, leaving this man and his mate alone upon the silent water.

I followed along the grassy shore to the hamlet of Nunni Nara, where the stone boats lie at anchor in the canal, under willow trees, by an ancient high-backed bridge of Imperial days. Here in the gloaming many of the people were clustered together, as in some little Dutch village, idly observing the life afoot. Along the canal where the boats were anchored, the boat people sat enjoying the quiet evening amidst fields of purple Iris ; their children about them, and their hearth-fires glowing within their transitory homes.

We anchored off Sumbal village, facing its superb cluster of chinars, from the heart of which, where a shrine lay hidden, a flame kept flickering like some soul that could not find repose. The night was silent, save when a boat came out of the darkness, the rowers singing softly to their oars,

but the river bore them away into its mystery. The Moon rose behind stray wisps and veils of cloud and lighted the river and its motion, and the reflections from the trees lay like velvet upon its surface. Afar off the Pir Pantsal was visible, with its veins of silver in the deep falling valleys and its far-spread snow-fields and icy peaks above.

* *
*

DAWN

I woke by some happy fortune at early dawn, to find the Moon in the last moments of her dominion over the night, and the white mountains still as the Sleeping Beauty under her spell. A band of violet shadow lay between them and her silver orb, and for a few seconds or moments the scene was one of life in suspense.

There lay the wide space of the unruffled river, and upon it the image of the Moon, and there was the grove of chinars, its light gone out, silent and still asleep. Upon the Iris meadows by the bank where the boat lay at anchor the night dew hung like jewels.

The world might have come happily to its end at this moment.

Yet was this but the prelude to a day in Kashmir.

The white silver of the Moon grew rosy with the dawn, as if swept by some secret emotion; pink waves of colour mingled almost invisibly with the violet shades, the morning-song of a thousand doves broke from the coverts, and upon the loftiest peaks the first arrows of the sun shone with a divine radiance. The eastern sky over Ah Tung, where Manasbal still slumbered, was lit with saffron hues, and Day was visibly at hand. The last star had gone and with it the shadows of night. Yet the moon still shone, queen-like and radiant upon her throne.

The trackers now awakened and stole swiftly ashore, the boat, as if quickened by some voluntary purpose, began to move, and the whole scene thereupon became animated with life. From instant to instant the snows became emblazoned with the morning, and from Tatakuti to Apharwat, along the whole array of the Pir Pantsal, the new-born day was ushered in. Gone were the violet bands, and the moon lay a-dying; and the moment of

her trespass was lost in the general resurrection. She passed like the light of a candle and was no more.

As though to mark the transition from night to gorgeous and animated Day, we were caught at this moment in the swirling current of the river, where it fiercely races under the obstructing piers of the wooden bridge of Sumbal.

CHAPTER IV

APPROACH TO SRINAGAR

At Shadipur the boatmen stay to eat their morning meal, and the boat lies by the shore in the midst of a circle of entrancing beauty.

Here is the loveliness of a Pastoral Land, with its flocks of sheep and their shepherds imaged in the still pools, under the shade of spreading trees; of a Water Land, through which a noble river flows placidly on to its destiny, dallying with the shining hours of its youth, while boats full of sheep and young lambs, that fill the gentle air with their plaints, are borne across its waters from level shore to level shore; of a Mountain Land, where sublime peaks and glaciers uplifted to the Heavens shine in the radiance of an eastern sun, and blue valleys fall precipitously to the water's edge.

Here at Shadipur also there is a mingling of the waters, and every outlook is upon a picture that fascinates the eye with its gentle and exquisite perfection.

As the boat moves, the softest of zephyrs blows, tempering the glow of the sunlight to a heavenly perfection of climate, so that one whispers to one's self, with a sense of complete attainment, the famous words of an Emperor:

> "If there be a Paradise on earth,
> It is here, it is here, it is here."

And there is indeed no other combination of wood and water and mountain, with physical ease, in all the world to equal this.

Every outlook here is a picture. There, upon my right hand, are the trackers bending under their toil by the edge of the silver water in the midst of green and purple fields, with the snowy bloom of the white thorn about

them and the yet more dazzling snows beyond; and there upon my left, knee-deep in the same green and purple pastures, are flocks of white sheep and black cattle, with a blue lagoon beyond and the mountains near at hand. A little further a fisherman flings his silvery net, and golden acres spread amidst the purple and the green; while a shepherd in his cloak stands still and solitary between water and mountain, his flock about him, and herons are mirrored in the next lagoon.

Here upon the lush meadows are mares with their young foals, and colts galloping about, intoxicated with the joy of life; here are cattle ploughing the rich earth to the loud calls of the ploughmen, milch goats with their kids passing the slumberous noon under the heavy shade of immemorial trees; birds overhead in the branches, and swallows that wheel by the hamlets and skim the lustrous water, and dart like arrows through the silken awnings of the boat.

And over all, there is the skylark singing his song in the sunlit spaces high above the world!

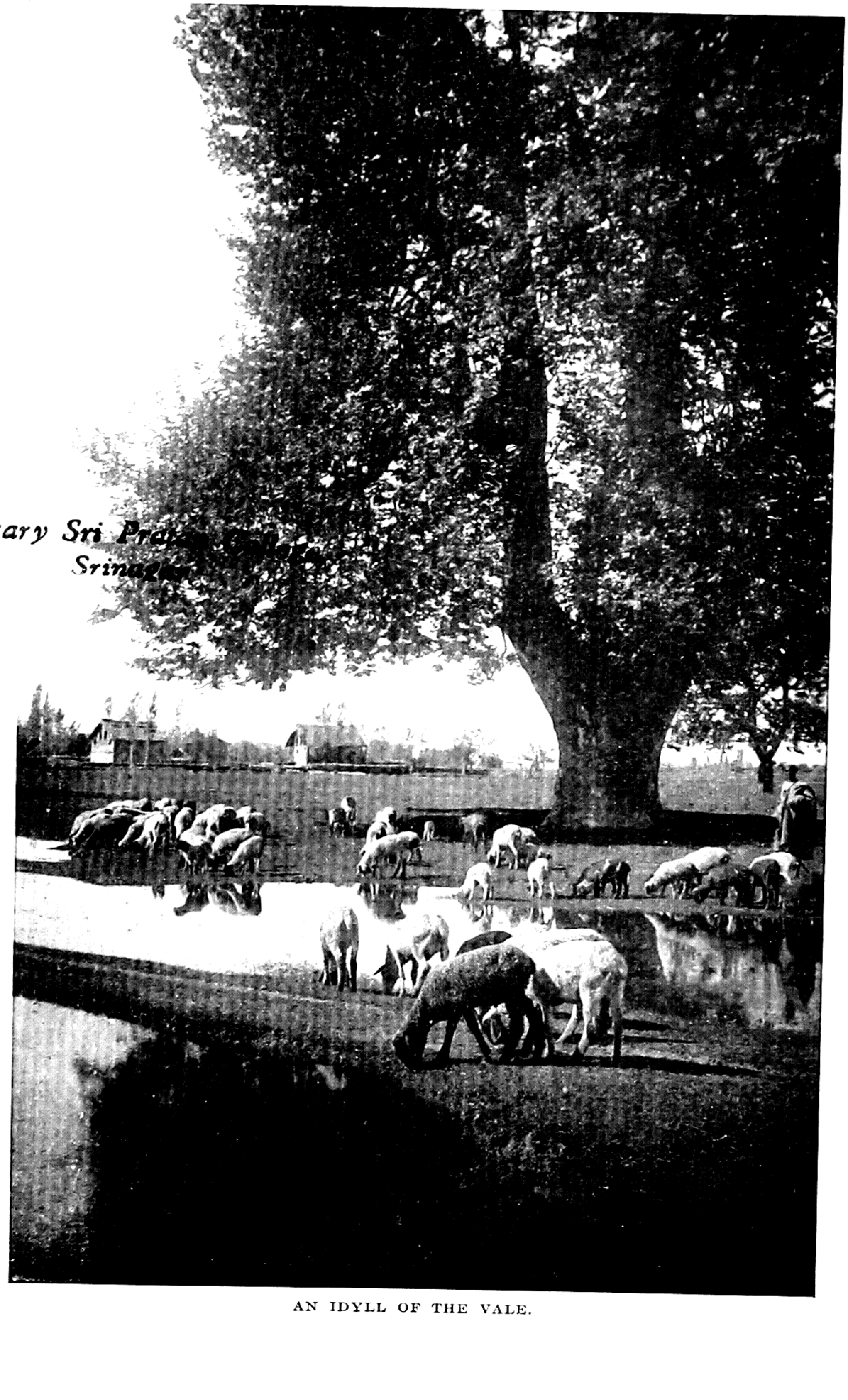
We pass a *Ziarat* by the river's edge, a walled-in enclosure, where, under the shade of mighty trees bending under their burden of years, a man lies buried who in his little day rose a head above his fellows by reason of his sanctity, and whose bones are now treasured as of help and comfort to the living. The Sayyad Husein Bokhari they call him, and he came, as his name implies, from some far haunt in Central Asia, by

"*Samarcand that far-famed Belvedere*,"

to live and die here amongst these people. Who shall say what was the real story of his life?

Round about him the village dead are buried, under a green hillock that flames with purple or gleams as white as snow in the season of the Flag, and in this secluded place under the light and shade of the great trees, where the birds sing and the river sweeps placidly on its way, they sleep in peace.

From somewhere here, up the long vistas of the river, we get our first glimpse of Hara Parbat and its dark fortress on the hill, and the Takht-i-Sulaiman, where from immemorial time there has been a temple of the Gods.



AN IDYLL OF THE VALE.

Between these two, the Acropolis and the Shrine, there lies Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, and here the circuit of the mountains to far beyond Vernag is now visibly complete. The long poplar highway which bisects the valley makes a great line like an army arrayed for battle, and the river, sweeping in splendid coils and loops through fields of flowers, brings one to the Gates of the City.

CHAPTER V

ENTERING THE CITY

THE picturesque assails one at every turn. Here are many things; an orchard overhanging the river wall; a mosque with its tall tower and carved windows, and its gallery by the water where two men in white garments are deep in the Moslem prayer, facing the full glare of the sun with a stoic piety; cool green pergolas of vines upon whose under-surface the water-gleams dance; two pretty faces at a fretted window, which is promptly closed with a coquettish smile, as though the owner would say "Very nice, no doubt, but not for you, Sir"; great stone basement walls from which rise, as in Venice, many-storied houses with windows looking on the river; glorious chinars flinging their dappled shade on sunlit walls and inner courts; gardens by the river hung with jasmines; and little birds that sing in cages as if they were free; the silvered cupola of a temple; beyond these the old-world bridges of the City, and Hara Parbat like a mediaeval castle on its hill; and then a side canal up which we turn, as in Venice, with a cry of warning, and the life changes as it does from the Grand Canal to a side water, and hundreds of boats are busy with the incidents of trade, with mighty timber for house-building, with straw and firewood from the country. Here in the vistas the view is grey and lacking in beauty of form and line, the houses tottering and squalor about. One murmurs "A Venice of hovels" after some by-gone observer; but near at hand there is the beauty of great trees to redeem it, of carved balconies;—and the unfailing life and colour of the Orient. Yet its very resemblance makes one sigh for the splendour and majestic loveliness of the Queen City. . . .

Perhaps it was like this a thousand years ago?

Let us call this rather a rural Venice.

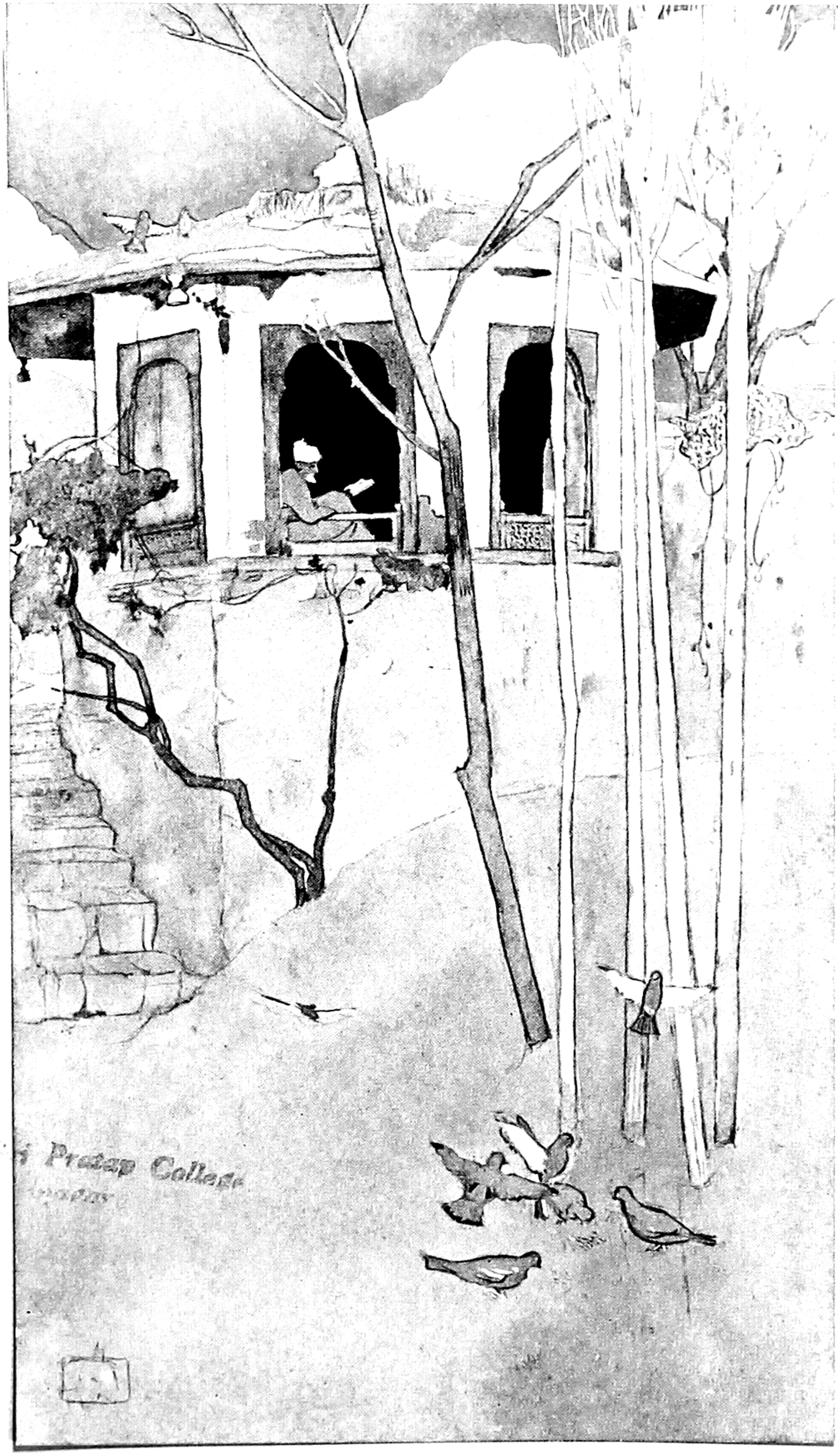
We have to make a hard fight and struggle for place, wherever the current runs fiercely under the piers of a bridge or where the passage is narrow. For here we are dealing with no still lagoon, but with a live creature given to passion under restraint. Every foot of progress has to be fought for here, every vantage seized, be it the side of an arch, or the hull of a boat, or the beams of a bridge overhead, and towing cord and punting pole are swiftly interchanged as the one or the other offers better promise of victory.

If it be a little placid on the open river as the boat glides slowly on its way, here in the City there is no lack of incident. It is evident that here we are launched upon a struggle in which victory may incline to the other side. And when the current is mastered there is danger from the overhanging boughs of the mulberry trees, which reach across the waterway and threaten the roof of the boat.

Presently we are rewarded for all this turmoil by a Persian Lilac hedge whose fragrance fills the narrow waters and makes the eyes rejoice with its wonted beauty. Its scent is somewhat richer, its bloom and foliage a little diverse from our own ; yet is it Lilac unmistakeably, and we reach up to it, and take of its abundance as we pass.

There are many faces at the windows and oriels of the houses as the boat pursues her course. Here for one is an ancient dame with her little grand-daughters, who laugh and salute us as we pass up, here a proud lady who draws the papered shutters to with a high disdain, here a white-bearded Pandit with glasses on his nose and a sacred volume on his knees, and by the water's edge, where the Quince trees are in bloom, there are women in pink with oval faces and dark eyes scouring and filling their brazen pots, and there is a wooden bridge over which the people pass on horseback and afoot, while the boat fights its way through the turmoil below. It is held with the utmost difficulty from dashing back into the piers, by poles which quiver and beat a rat-tat against the hull, till the straining trackers hurry to the bank and the battle is won. But while all this is happening and the result is yet uncertain a raft of a dozen great logs lashed together comes swiftly down upon us, and striking a pier envelops it, and bursts asunder. The two raftsmen with their long poles are carried down on a moiety, while the rest break away and drift down the river, a danger to those embarked upon it.

NOONDAY PEACE AT THE NISHAT BAGH



Another fight, more tense and longer in suspense, brings us under the walls of Sher Garhi, the palace of the Maharajah, to the beating of drums, the blare of conch shells and the noise of ritual, into the wide river; and so into the dusk, with the pink hues of sunset on the water, a blue haze in the vistas and sparrows busy settling for the night. We pass by carved stairways that betray the touch of a noble hand, into the Tsunth-Kul or Apple Tree canal, where under the great chinars all is peace.

The stars are now shining over head, and their reflections gleam in the lane of waters.

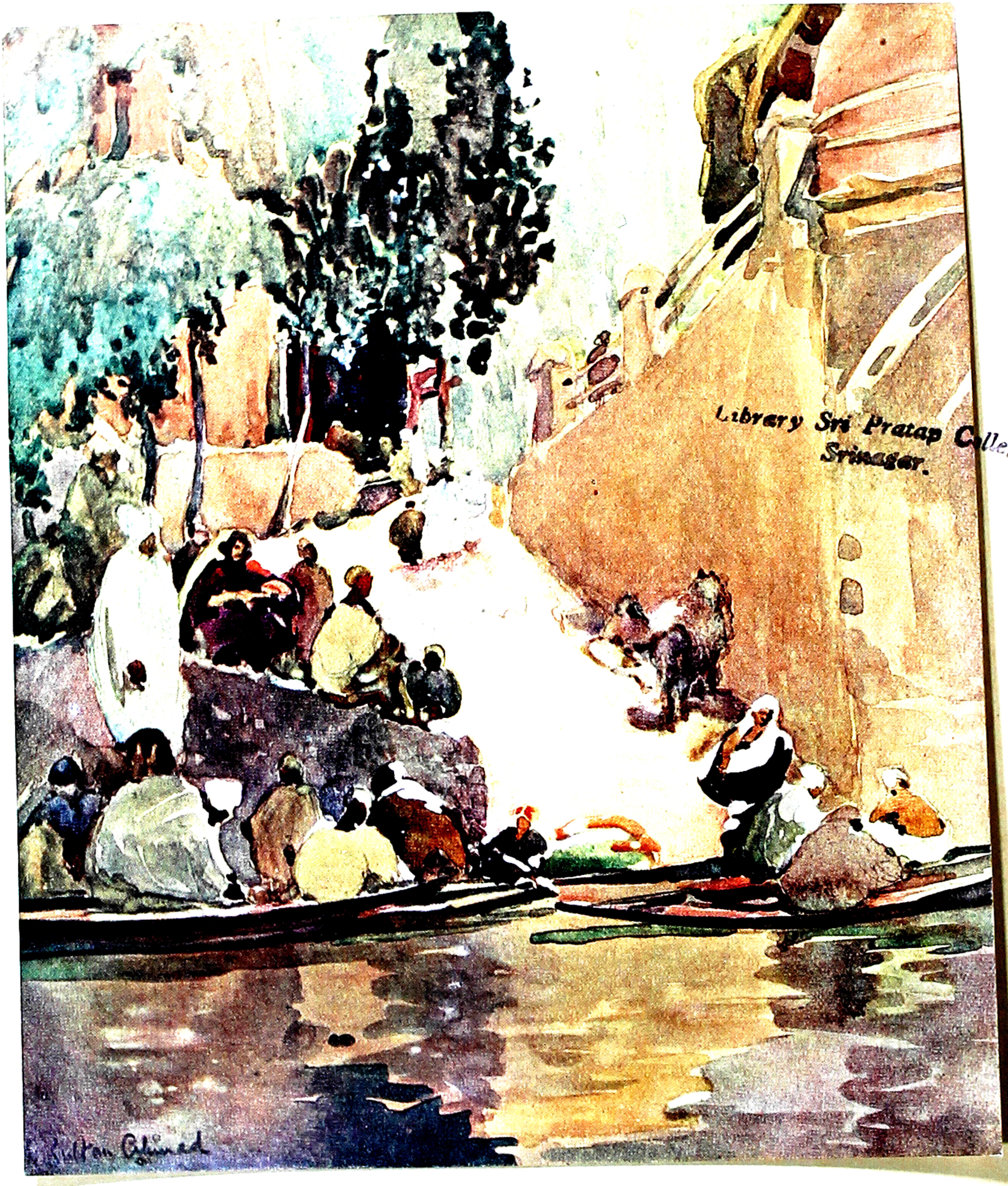
A little further and we are in the midst of the far-famed Chinar Bagh, where the English house-boats lie at anchor, and as we pass them slowly, one by one, they yield glimpses of homely interiors, and drawing rooms with pictures and books upon the walls, of silver and white linen—of a woman bending over a night-lamp making a child's food.

The boat touches and we come to rest by a grassy bank under the sweeping boughs of a mighty tree, and one is assailed by the conviction that one has dropped into the very lap of the Gods! One is in the midst, it would seem, of a conspiracy on everybody's part, from the Kashmir Raj to the humble boatmen who toil all day, to do all that the heart of spoilt and luxurious man can require.

For here is everything; scenery, solitude, company, service, indulgence, the vagrant irresponsible life, and a home upon the water. Here one is encloistered in the heart of Asia, upon the far side of those majestic snows which shine like an eternal barrier between India and the world beyond; yet by some magic, here is the life of an English river, the life of Henley and of Oxford—of house-boats and window blinds, and level places over the roof, set with chairs and cushions and flowers, and within, books, and all the last refinements of civilized life. A miracle—nothing less!

"Each spot in Kashmir one is inclined to think the most beautiful of all."

Sir Francis Younghusband.



THE APPLE TREE CANAL

CHAPTER VI

FIRST MORNING AT SRINAGAR

THE morning light reveals the sum of my environment. Here below me, where the water is running past to its junction with the river, is the Tsunth-Kul or Apple-Tree Canal. A few yards away are the great gates through which the clear sparkling waters of the Dal Lake rush with a vehement joy.

The Dal Lake is one of the wonders of the world, and its joys must be left to another exploration; but so tempting is this doorway that I cannot resist crossing the water from the green-gold corner where my boat has passed the night, for a glimpse into the far-famed loveliness beyond.

Here is water, "clear and soft as silk," through which as the *shikara* glides I can see the little fish darting about like arrows in their under-world of weeds. Here are bending willows by its shores, and orchards yet in bloom, and house-boats with chairs and cushions under white canopies the image of holiday enjoyment, an English boat-house with a girl painting from a corner of its balcony, and *shikaras* waiting like slim gondolas by the gate to carry one abroad; a Rajah encamped in a secluded corner, groups of Biblical people under the shade of the chinar trees, boat loads of veiled women and laughing children of kin with those who dwell by The Sweet Waters of Asia; and over all the resplendent snows, and Solomon's Throne and the castle of Hara Parbat.

So I leave it for the present, and returning to the Apple-Tree Canal follow it up stream to the river. It winds here in a great curve through lines of slim poplars whose shadows fall in velvet bars across its lucent face, and there are black cattle moving along its green slopes, and house-boats at anchor beside it. And then, wonderful to relate, there is the sudden tolling of a church bell, and along the foot-paths and high embankment

of the river there are English women and children on their way to church in sweet frocks and hats, with prayer-books in their hands!

Such are the surprises and contrasts of Kashmir; and it is characteristic of this favoured corner of the earth, that no sooner is one scene of loveliness past, than one is plunged into another of equal but wholly different beauty.

So I felt when, from the Dal Lake and the Apple-Tree Canal, I came upon the river embankment by the Munshi Bag for the first time in my life. For here were plane trees of the most noble proportions, shelving gardens to the river's edge of white and purple Irises, the air heavy with their perfume; house-boats in the shelter of the young willow trees, and the river itself like a superb Isis with giant avenues of poplars upon its further shore.

Here upon the near bank were Elizabethan-looking houses, laden with wisterias and roses, encompassed about with lawns and gardens, and shaded by great trees at whose feet the daisies enamelled the grass. There was throughout a sense of abounding life, as though growth came without volition, and Nature seemed to look at one with a deep benevolence and say: "This is but a fraction of what I can accomplish."

The church, whose spire rose but a little above the level of the embankment, seemed buried in roses and flowers and rooted in lush meadows, and upon the embankment itself there was the English club, with its rich carpets and dark timbered walls and its wooden seats across the road, reserved for its members, whence under the shelter of four monumental chinars, that may have grown here when Elizabeth was on her throne, they see the world go by, the rushing river upon the one hand with its multitudinous life, and their own women and children, domestic, as in England, upon the other.

One soon grows accustomed to this environment and comes to take it as of course; but this first impression must linger on far into after years. For here indeed is a pleasure-ground unsurpassed in Asia; and the life is indulgent, Oriental. Instead of poling your own punt or paddling your own canoe, you sit here in a light *shikara*, with white awnings and embroidered curtains to temper the sunlight, and are carried where you will by those whose one object in life seems, to be at your service. It is this mingling of

Eastern complaisance with English homeliness and beauty that makes Kashmir so unapproachable in its way ; and wherever you go there is room and freedom to do as you will.

My own boat is anchored, apparently by some voluntary act upon its own part, by the rim of a grassy island, under the most princely trees in the world, and the neighbourhood by some enchantment has become mine. All day long I can sit here upon the roof of my boat, by the edge of a sun-lit stream, with this green-gold canopy above me and a series of infantile bays and inlets in the grassy shore below, and life ever in motion on the stream. Here a slim *shikara*, with a bevy of Indian women in pink silks and white muslins out for the day, then another laden with *objets d'art*, insinuating its way under my notice as though I might be Croesus himself ; while all the day long, from early dawn to starry night, the people go about their affairs of business and of pleasure, softly, by indulgence of the placid water. Here is life made easy, and it is a life that appeals to East and West alike. We have it upon high authority that they can never meet ; but they meet in Kashmir.

CHAPTER VII

THE CAPITAL

SRINAGAR is unique. You may compare it with this or that (and it is like a tattered Venice most of all), but it remains, and will always remain, in a category apart. Some fourteen hundred years ago it supplanted Asoka's city at Pandréthan hard by, and it has retained by right of place its claim to be the capital of Kashmir.

" Where else," asks its chronicler with an affectionate pride—" where else on earth, apart from that city, can one find easily streams meeting, pure and lovely, at pleasure-residences and near market streets ? "

" Where else do the inhabitants, on a hot summer day, find before their houses water like that of the Vitasta, cooled by large lumps of snow ? " And

" Where else in the centre of a city is there a pleasure-hill from which the splendour of all the houses is visible as if from the sky ? "

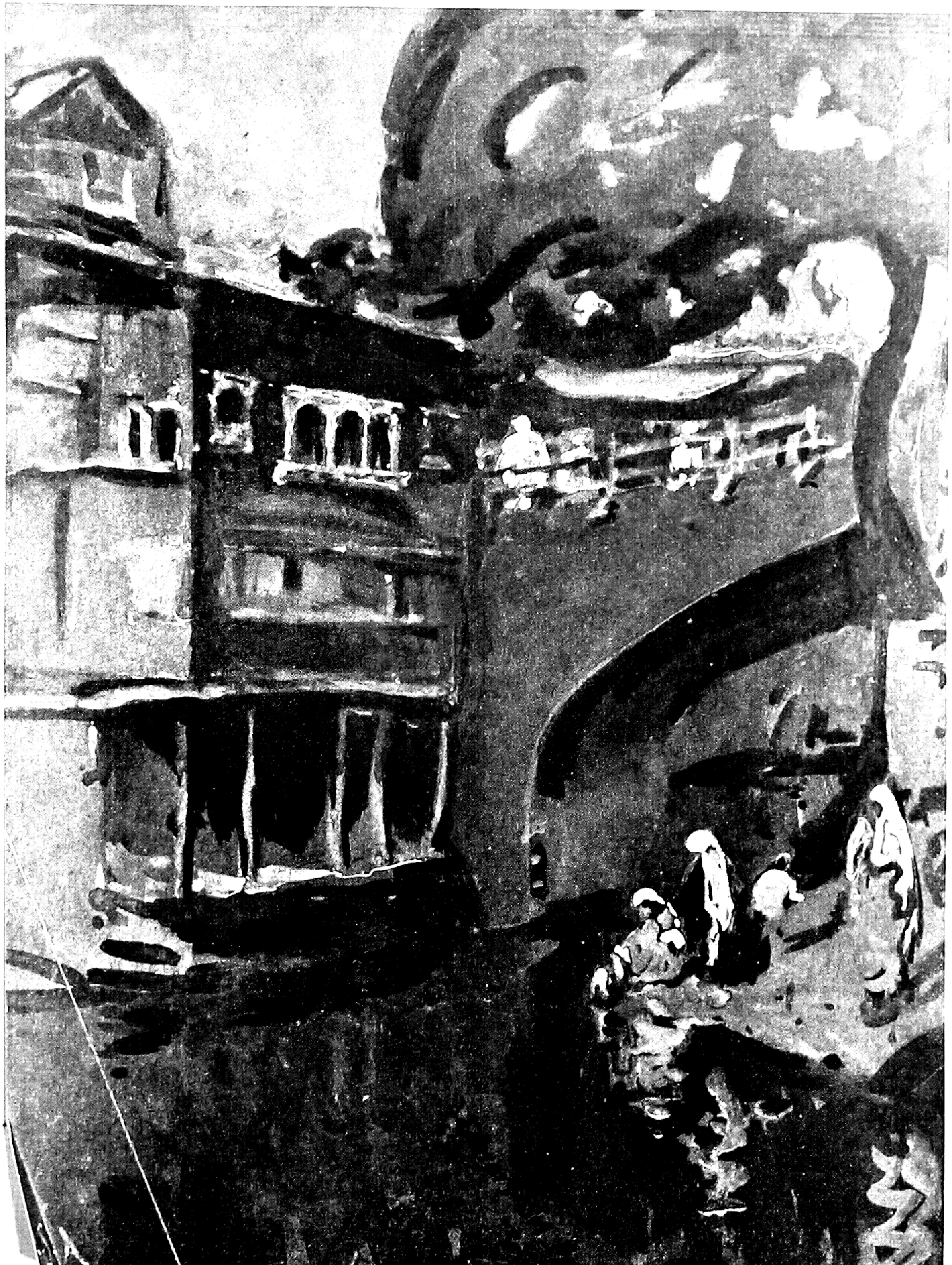
From this Acropolis, indeed, one can look not only upon the streets and lanes, the canals, the lazy coiling river, the shining lakes and pleasure-gardens, the mosques, palaces, temples, and many-storied houses of the city, but upon nearly the whole of the valley of Kashmir. In bygone days the city was itself known as Kashmir, and it ruled the valley and the mountains and absorbed them into its own life as completely as Athens did or Florence. All the tradition and personality of the Kashmiri—the intellect, wit, craft, arts, religion, beauty, refinement, and degradation of this singular people—are concentrated in this sordid yet lovely city, that fascinates and repels one by turns.

Its soul and impulse is the river, which winds through it in loops, flowing under its seven bridges, its stone embankments in which the shattered

remnants of temples and shrines and violated gods are buried, its stairs where the people bathe, and women with bare feet, descending and ascending, fill their water-pots; its shops, its mosques, its gardens blowing by the water's edge. Side canals, that ultimately link with it, flow through dark alleys and under ancient high-backed bridges, and carry one into the city's most secret haunts. Streets and lanes intersect the maze of houses, with the same bewildering complexity that they do in Venice; and curious surprises await one, as when the Mar Canal, after an hour's wandering, carries one's boat to a point whence it is borne upon the shoulders of a dozen men through a crowded lane of high houses, that almost meet overhead, and dropped into the wide open stream of the river. Here in the heart of this city is Asia: life and death jostling each other; children that swarm in prolific homes, while cholera and disease slay them without pity; vice in the dark alleys and secret places; piety in the streets, where men seem ever at prayer; houses that grow into beautiful forms and delicate traceries as by the light of nature, yet are so shaken and awry with neglect that one marvels how they escape an instant dissolution; gardens, laden with roses and filled with the scent of lilacs and jasmines, overhanging dark waters whose breath is the breath of a sewer; a populace steeped in poverty and given to incredible toil with fine needles, whose supple fingers in bygone days made the shawls of Kashmir a wonder of the world; yet a people idle and pleasure-loving, who pass you with smiles upon their handsome faces and the treachery of centuries of practice at their hearts; a people reputed by strangers to be full of duplicity and treachery, and a hundred unpleasant qualities; yet also commended by some who know them for their hospitality, their gratitude, their domestic affections, and their freedom from crime; homes that are sealed to the outer world, yet a life that is lived in public, with that astonishing candour, sociability, and charm that characterise the East.

You enter your *shikara*, and are carried down the buoyant water, swaying with its life, and as you go the houses of the city defile before you. Here is a shop, with its carved oriels overlooking the river, and its creaking signboard inviting you to buy the finest carvings, the best *papier-mâché* in Kashmir. At the windows are the numerous proprietors calling upon you with voice and gesture to enter. You yield to the invitation, resolved to

THE MAR CANAL



buy nothing ; your boat is stopped by a flight of stairs ; you climb a narrow and sullied street, and you enter—an enchanted garden ! Did you think when you climbed up here and crossed that forbidding threshold that you would find before you a sun-lit *patio*, green grass and banks of Persian lilac, whose perfume would fill the drowsy air ? Those dark and solemn cypresses, that little orchard set upon its terrace, those roses waiting to bloom ?

At the far side of this inner court seated at the carved Saracenic windows, each a frame for a picture, sit the patient carvers and painters ; while the rooms beyond are full of lovely things the product of their skill. From the windows on the river-face there is a view that is one of the world's masterpieces.

You resume your journey. The river rushes under the wooden piers of the bridges, the people pass overhead ; from carved oriels and fretted balconies groups of women and girls look out upon the passing show. Some have beautiful faces, many more are graceful. At others there are old men with white beards, and these sit with a singular dignity by the windows reading from some scriptural text, regardless of the outer world. Children laugh and play by the stream's edge. Upon the silvered roofs of the temples the sun shines with a dazzling light, and the whole face of the river is luminous with a brightness that vanquishes the eyes. A puff of white smoke suddenly emerges from one of the bastions of the fort overlooking the city, the air is filled with a roar, and slowly round a bend in the river comes the Maharajah's barge with its rowers in scarlet, its walls lacquered and painted in red and yellow, the colours of Spain. In the rush of boats that follows, your own is jostled and splashed by the sparkling waters.

You leave the river and enter the narrow crowded streets of the city, where the people are astir like bees in a hive. Here goes the Pandit with his stately air and his pretty wife in a rose-pink gown ; the Mullah with his rosary, representing the rival creed ; the Hamal, as you have seen him in Stamboul, bent under a great burden ; here in the shops are the tailors and the goldsmiths, the cobblers, the braziers, the bookbinders, the confectioners, and all those numerous people who ply their trade under the public eye in an Eastern city. And here are the purchasers, women buying

little cups of milk for a farthing and small groceries meticulously weighed out, and life in all its variety and simplicity.

You would see the interiors of some of these tall houses whose fretted windows and forbidding doors invite your curiosity? You would obtain a glimpse of the craftsmen at work on their shawls, their embroideries, their *papier-mâché*?

It is possible just now to see both together in two of the most attractive old houses in Srinagar. These houses are a revelation of beauty after the *rococo* palace of the Maharajah and the tin-roofed shops and distressing buildings of the European quarter.

From the narrow street you pass into a wide sunlit court, upon the far end of which there opens the front door of the house. Over it there is a wide Saracenic arch, which is half a dome, painted and cusped within, with a seat upon either hand for the doorkeeper and his cronies to sit and warm themselves in the sun. Here, some mules which have carried in a burden are tethered as before a Spanish entrance, fretting and whisking away the flies. High above them soars the front of the house, perfectly proportioned and spaced, with deep overhanging eaves of carved cedar, with projecting oriels and windows filled with *pinjra* work in arabesque designs. From the door a stone passage leads straight through the house to the crowded sunlit street beyond. You cannot but pause in its soft gloom to enjoy this sight of the passing world, like a picture on a screen.

A narrow and winding stair that suggests the middle ages climbs through the interior of the house to the lighted rooms, in which the workers are busy over delicate embroideries; no less than seventy-five men and boys in a space that would be cramped for half a dozen Englishmen. They are a frail community these hereditary weavers, who sit here now with their slender pliant fingers, their sensitive faces and dark liquid eyes, embroidering the linen and canvas before them with millions of stitches. What incredible labour it is, like that of bees in a comb, which goes to create the finished article, for which you pay so little, and which you so lightly fling aside in the dealer's shop for some little fault in the pattern or in the scheme of colour! Here it seems inhuman to tax the life and patience of any creature with a soul, to this extent.

This house in which they are assembled once belonged to a Vizier; so that beside these more open rooms there is the secluded chamber in which his women sat behind a screen of fretted cedar, half visible and half concealed. Its front window looks out upon the world, and in particular upon the upper floor of an adjoining house, where to-day there is a great room full of children at school. But in the past . . . it may be that glances passed from lattice to lattice of which the Vizier was unaware.

Here is another house which is even more attractive than this. You enter it directly from the street, and passing through its central hall, where the door-keeper slumbers, you are taken at a sharp angle into a garden-court, which, though a little neglected now, is still beautiful. Into this secluded place, with its high walls, there is no entrance save past the door-keeper. In its centre is a deep well, and beside it an impluvium of cut and fashioned stone, over which a great vine spreads its lucent canopy, and in its season bunches of the finest grapes in Kashmir. The vine reaches away to the walls of the house, which it partially covers; and under its shelter a wooden trough, brown with the velvet of time, carries the water from the well to the Hummam within the house.

A flight of outer steps carries you to the door of entrance, and through it into a narrow hall, where in a cool corner under the staircase the drinking water of the house is stored in earthen jars. On the right there is an attractive room with a carved ceiling and a line of windows opening on the garden. This is the winter sitting-room with its double floor and walls, through which the heated air from the Hummam passes, escaping outwards at last through little apertures under the roof. Adjoining it is the Hummam, where the luxury of a Turkish bath is available to the owner and his guests. Passing on up the spiral stairs one arrives at the *chef d'œuvre* of the house—a summer room under its flower-bedded roof, with a long series of windows upon three of its sides, yielding exquisite views of the Pir Pantsal snows, and of the green roofs, balconies, and spires of the houses and mosques of the city. There is an inner row of carved wooden pillars which supports an oval dome, lined with cedar wood. The floor of this inner compartment is a few inches lower than that of the surrounding verandah, which is yet a part of it; and the whole plan and design of

this elevated chamber are conceived with an instinctive skill. You cannot doubt that it is the creation of a living school of Architecture, thrown off with scarcely an effort by craftsmen trained by centuries of practice. The plaster cornices and Saracenic arches, the shapely pillars and the perfect ovoid dome of the roof, all speak of a facile skill.

There is but one door to this beautiful chamber, that by which you enter it up the winding stair. Light and shadow mingle in subtle gradations within it, though every window of it is open to the brilliant sun. But each of these windows is also equipped with fretted screens of cedar, which fall with a touch into their places, making beautiful sombre patterns against the sunlight without, and filling the room within with harmonies of light.

Here you will find the *papier-mâché* workers at their craft, seated at the windows and in the bays and oriels of the outer space, half in shadow themselves while the light falls upon their work; a community of humble patient people with refined features and delicate hands, more like women than men. Some are busy smoothing the surface of the *papier-mâché*, others grinding the brilliant paint; while the rest, and these the skilled craftsmen, are painting in with fine brushes the design of each bowl and tray and box, without any pattern before them, and next laying over this the colours, and ultimately the varnish of liquid amber, which brings the piece to completion. The finished products are displayed, or covered over with a veil of fine muslin, in the inner chamber under the dome. Foreign taste and low prices have not helped to raise the level of this craft, and with the strange unconsciousness of Eastern workers, the same person will produce an exquisite piece full of feeling and refinement of design and colour, beside another which is only fit to be thrown out of the window or carried to the furnace of the Hummam. One feels that these people go right or wrong without knowing it. Yet here are skill, the instinct for beauty, the marvellous patience and infinite labour of those who would succeed.

The craft of the *papier-mâché* painter was introduced here from Samarcand by King Zain-ul-ab-i-din and was confined at its outset to the bow-shafts of the period. It is still known as Kamangari, or Bow-craft, and the quarter of the city where the painters congregate is called by that name.

This beautiful and convenient house was built some forty years ago by a Persian merchant, who came here to trade in shawls, and eventually settled down in Kashmir. His son, to whom the house has descended, pursues his father's calling as a dealer in shawls, though an ever-increasing shadow has fallen upon it since the Prussians broke the Second Empire and deprived the shawl trade of its principal market.

From these intimacies of the City one may pass on to its more notable sights: to the Tomb of Zain-ul-Abidin, the Sultan whose fame still survives in Kashmir, to the great Mosque which is like Solomon's Temple, built upon a stately scale with lofty pillars of cedar, but is now in a state of dissolution. Beside its tall columns, each of which was once a prince of the forest, some of the greatest of the Mogul Emperors have bowed their heads in prayer, and the idlers and Mullahs who beg in its precincts, the refuse of a departed age, still murmur the name of Aurangzeb.

Old as it looks, it supplanted a far more ancient temple of wrought stone, whose mouldings and pediments lie scattered about the grounds.

Islam has done much for the world in its Architecture, inspired by the doctrine of the one God; but the havoc it has wrought in its iconoclastic fury is fearful to think of. All over Kashmir there lie in ruins the classical temples of the past; and countless others have disappeared from the face of the earth, broken into road metal, built into dams and embankments, and flung into the lakes and rivers. There was one egregious person who boasted of the title of the Sultan Butshikan—the Image Breaker—by which infamous designation he is likely to be known with increasing ill-favour as the full extent of his depredations is revealed.

There are other Mosques, some of marble like one that was built by Nur Jahan, others of wood; there are Temples covered with tin, and one with sheets of tarnished gilt by the Maharajah's palace. There is even a ruined place where Christ is supposed to have lived, and whence he ascended into Heaven. And then, overlooking all this strange welter of beauty and decay, this maze of streets and canals and houses, and all the seething life of this incomparable city, is Akbar's old fortress, with its Castle high upon that hill, "whence," as the old chronicler says, "the splendour of it all is visible as if from the sky."

You enter it through a great gateway of cut stone, fashioned by the unerring hand of the Moguls. Here, through its half gloom, from sunlight to sunlight, the people pass on their way to and from the City. Over the archway an inscription upon marble in the flowing script of Persia records the construction of this new (and now so old) City of Akbar, its walls and towers, at a cost of one hundred and ten lakhs of rupees. Two hundred workmen in stone, and many skilled masons, were brought here from India to build it; and it was twelve years, as the people will tell you, before the Emperor and his son, who had begun at opposite ends, finally met upon the completion of the walls.

But the glory of Akbar's day has departed: the titanic wall, with its embrasures and loopholes, is shattered and in ruins; the great gates are crumbling, and within there is scarcely a trace now of the houses and palaces and buildings of that period. Herds of cattle and ponies graze on the soft undulating grass which covers the waterways and fountains of some old garden; and almond-trees now blossom over the whole of the vast interior. Here in the spring the city people come and sit all day under the white bloom which ushers in the vernal year; and here, as one stands upon the battlements and looks far down upon the back-waters of the Lake, one realises that one is looking upon the remnants of an early time, when the foundations of an empire were being laid, and before the silken days of pleasure had supervened. For it was Akbar's half century of mastery that won for Jahangir his thirteen years of ease and dalliance in Kashmir.

From this dead city one climbs to the citadel of Hara Parbat, which soars above it. Water was always the difficulty of these old rock-castles, and as one ascends one passes an old well with the remnants of great stairs descending to it from the keep; and here, covering the bare and forbidding slopes, there are acres of Iris, and from out the tawny grass there stand out black mottled stones, like a squadron of panthers advancing upon the citadel. One enters it by a side gateway as one enters Chitor or Toledo, its massive door armed with spikes of iron; and so one passes through one court into another, where roses are blooming, and a small garden of pomegranates relieves the mediæval fierceness of the place. Over another gate there is a piece of marble inscribed in Persian, relating the exploits of Ata

Mahamad Khan, the Afghan Viceroy, who built this castle in the 1226th year of the Prophet. The folds of the door are of solid slabs of chinar. There is a Hindu temple within, and a priest ringing a small bell and chanting his daily litany. His voice, as it echoes within the sombre interior, and is borne through the loopholes and embrasures of the Fortress into the outer air, carries one's thoughts back far beyond the days of Akbar to some primitive mist of time, when this hill was the abode of the dread goddess whose name it bears, and whose worship survives the lapse of unnumbered centuries. From these secret and inner courts one ascends to the roof of the Citadel, whence the whole world seems spread at one's feet in the sunshine.

There, are the tawny roofs of the city, soft vistas of the winding river, green fields and lonely avenues of trees, mosques and palaces and shrines, all mingled at this distance in one serene and composite whole. Nearer at foot one can trace the circumambient walls of Akbar, the circle of almond orchards that engirdles the Citadel, the Lake of Anchar, the far-famed beauty of the Dal, the gleam of the distant Wular, the splendours of Hara Mukh, and Mahadev, the Throne of Solomon superb and simple in its graceful line, the cumulose masses of chinars which mark the Imperial Gardens, bridges, and roads, and all the thousand incidents of a city displayed. Over and above these there is the white gleam and encompassing majesty of the Pir Pantsal, which stands sentinel over this valley in the "womb of Himalaya," as though to shelter it from the rough hands of a barbaric world. From here I could see the cloud masses sweeping in purple folds over valley and mountain, the sun shining in floods of sunlight, gilding the temple spires and peaks of immortal loveliness, and the whole pageant of Nature, in which man plays so transient and humble a part, accomplishing itself.

The Fortress still dominates the scene with its guns and high walls and frowning battlements; but the hard unrelenting race which built it, ruling this lovely valley with an iron hand, and careless of the feelings and affections of the people, has been long since flung out—as such people always are in the end—to be punished in the next world, if not in this. No one regrets the Afghan in Kashmir. But how gladly the people speak of the Padishahs, of the wise and tolerant Akbar, the pleasure-loving Jahangir,

and the splendid Shah Jahan. Their memory survives not only in the fine old walls and gateways of Akbar's City and in the exquisite gardens by the Lake shores, but in the hearts of the people.

Who would suspect in the midst of this City, with its wooden houses, in these gardens and haunts of pleasure, anywhere in this lovely valley in which Nature and Man seem alike so complaisant, the existence of this typical Mohammedan City-Fortress, so like in its character to those which the Moguls have left in India? There are some indeed who spend many years in the valley and upon the Lakes without discovering that Akbar designed to create here a city after that model.

But in truth it was needless, and out of harmony with the soft and voluptuous character of the people. Give them their silken waterways, their canoes and pleasure-boats, their floating gardens and orchards, and let who will rule and build fortresses, so long as they are not called upon to live in them. That is their sentiment. And so it was that Akbar's city failed of accomplishment.

But when the almond-trees are in bloom, and Time, to whose wisdom they trust, has covered all fierceness with soft green turf, then are the people willing to come in and dream under the white flowers, and sing and pass a fortnight of the year here, where Akbar would have had them live in martial state.

"The delight of the Worldling and the retired abode of the Recluse."

Abul Fazl.

"Perhaps in the whole world there is no corner so pleasant as the Dal Lake."

Lawrence.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DAL

THE Dal, whose beauties were so opulently chanted by Tom Moore, who never saw it, is something more than a piece of exquisite water. It is a world in itself. Here are fields, and orchards whose bloom drifts upon the lucent waters, and meadows enamelled with purple and gold; splendid trees, the chinar, the poplar and the apricot, and willows by the water-ways; houses of the great and the humble, and gardens of the Emperors: sheep feeding in the grassy glades, and black cattle; the plough-man behind his steers; little fish speeding like arrows through the limpid waters; halcyons displaying their turquoise wings and bulbuls singing in the willows, and turtle-doves whose music fills the morning. Here are canoes carrying the people about their daily avocations, with women in them and lovely children, and barges laden with the produce of the islands; *shikaras* that wait in line behind the flood-gates like gondolas at S. Mark's. Here are the floating-gardens of Kashmir, and the gardeners at work carrying fresh soil across the Lake where it widens, while their punting poles shine like silver in the sunlight, and one who is love-sick sings a *ghazal* in the stern. The gardens look like firm earth till you move away a yard or two and then see them suspended in the lustrous water, while the dragon-flies flash about them with incredible speed.

And ever beyond these there are the white snows and Solomon's Throne, and the blue uprising mountains with their shining peaks and shadowy valleys imaged in the Lake.

It is a place that is apt to spoil one, its beauty like that of the woman who loves you is so accessible, its charm so little concealed. You have but to call a *shikara*, and in a moment you are launched upon its joys.

You leave for it, it may be, at early dawn, before the melting snows have raised the level of the River and so closed the great sluice gates of the Lake. Early as is the hour, life is already afoot. Here is a man standing placidly in the water taking his morning ablution, and many more like him with the early light shining upon their faces, absorbed in the morning prayer. The boats are moving and the day has begun.

The sun is not yet risen behind the Takht-i-Sulaiman, but Hara-Parbat is already bathed in an amber glow of light, a beautiful proud castle on its hill. Upon the far snows of Tata Kuti and the Pir Pantsal the sun has long been shining, but the Eastern mountains, behind whose sierras his orb is concealed, are yet wrapped in deep violet shadows, where the Nishat Bagh and the Shalimar still slumber in the embraces of Night. The waters below and about us are grey and green and gleaming with light, birds are a-wing, and the sounds of increasing day are abroad; the plash of oars, the voices of women, the twittering cheep of the swallows as they swiftly skim the water, the strident crowing of chanticleer.

See the red-heifer in the morning sun, the whole poise of her body receptive of his warmth and light; the boats, stealing through the green willows, like phantoms of the morning; the white geese sailing with their little families like a fleet abroad; the orioles flitting like shafts of sunlight through the glades!

We come to Kraliyar where a temple with its silver roof is shining in the sun, and its stairs and carved balconies over the water are crowded with Brahmins bathing and at prayer. The ritual they are at is incomparably old. Beyond the temple there is a beautiful old bridge of Mogul days, with the name of the builder written in marble under its shadowy arches, and about it a cluster of many houses, with high garden walls hung with vines and alive with the dancing of water gleams on wall and leaf. Red roses droop from the garden pavilions, and a field of white Iris is as moonlight in the morning. Hereabouts is a big shepherd carrying sheaves of young willow-shoots to his goats, while his children play by the water. One of these, a little girl of five, consents to be made a picture of, but holds her very heart with fear and finally breaks into tears, though she goes bravely through the awful ordeal to its close.

The home of this family is upon an island that rises a foot above

the lake and is ringed about with white poplars. Upon its outskirts there are water-lilies and neat willows, and upon its edges there lie the last clods of earth and fibre from the lake bed that have been added to its sum. Within this miniature embankment there are fields and orchards. In the centre there is the house, tall and double-storied, of brown wood, with a thatched roof; and about this little inclusive world there is an expanse of clear waters, and high mountains whose shadows change and swoon upon its surface.

Twenty years ago when this man was still a lad, this homestead had not emerged from the waters of the lake. One need not grudge him his possession; yet it is this ceaseless hunger for firm earth which is gradually narrowing the borders of the Dal, and will one day convert one of the loveliest waters of the world into fields and tenements.

As we approach the Nishat Bagh the environment changes subtly from peasant homes in a fen-country, from the pleasant scenes and events of rural life, to something that is visibly superb and noble. For here the mountains are very near, and their giant masses stand up above the lake "like the thrones of Kings." Deep blue shadows lie about them, giving a lustre to their green surface, and steep valleys fall profoundly to the water.

Yet between them and the lake there is room for an Imperial Garden.

The still noon, as we draw near it, is resonant with the crooning of doves, whose music is borne as if by enchantment across the unruffled mirror of the lake. A high-backed bridge makes a water-gate or portal to the garden and its imperial pavilions.

A man who passed it in bygone days must have known that he was now entered upon the dangerous precincts of the Court.

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Every step I take in this wonderful valley carries me into possession of something that is yet more exquisite, till my power of expression is numbed and my senses are overcome with a beauty I cannot yet grasp or describe. I am thus in a position to sympathise with the Court Poet at the Coronation

of the Emperor upon whom a fresh Robe of Honour was flung with each verse that fell from his lips!

I have a suspicion as I enter the Nishat Bagh that the Door of Paradise has been opened, and that I have been led by some Peri by the hand to look upon what must surely be the most wonderful view in the world. I speak not of the garden rising in imperial terraces, with a lavishness of space, and of height beyond height, to the overwhelming contour of the mountains; for as yet I have had no power to advance beyond the first pavilion of the garden. To this I am tied as by the Peri's wand, and I am content to sit by the marble throne upon which so many that were great and splendid in their day reposed; Shan Jahan who so loved his dear lady of the Taj, Dara unwitting of his terrible end, and Aurangzeb whose cold heart was set upon other things than the beauty of this World. Reclining here in the noon-day peace, I look upon the same marvellous picture that they, and so many more whose names are writ in water, must have looked upon. Even now it is something of an exclusive view, for the door which admits me into this belvedere is closed behind me, and I am the sole tenant with the birds of this magic chamber looking out upon a faery scene of incomparable beauty.

How shall I record its loveliness?

There is in truth the Lake before me, a great pool of tranquil water, blue where the sky looks into it, white and opal where the ascending clouds throw their living image upon it, still, as if an enchantment lay upon it; like a sheet of silver here, like an embroidered carpet there, where the water-lilies rise upon their slender filaments to its surface, to lap at ease above the hidden world below; so wide and calm that it looks of kin with infinite space, yet defined by shadowy trees which hang as it were between water and heaven, by hamlets and villages whose brown roofs mingle with the natural world, by a castle set upon a hill, the image of an Hellenic Acropolis, yet touched with I know not what suggestion of a monastery upon a hill, in which some Buddhist Pope might have his habitation, aloof from the sorrow, the transitoriness and the illusion of Life; and yet again, defined by mountains so vast and so far-uplifted into Heaven, that they might be the very thrones of God!

Blue they are and silver in their valleys, and snow-white upon their heights, yet in this fierce noon-day sun all molten into one marvellous prism of light. So great they look, with the white cloud-towers mingling with their summits, that they seem to have no limits to their greatness.

Thus you have mountain and sky and water and a castle upon a hill, and the tale might be thought complete were it not for some one whose instinct for perfection added a bridge, high-arched as of olden days, dark and shadowy in the midst of this lustrous world. A thin line like a thread of green connects it at either end with the substantial earth, and cattle steal out from the woods and cross this filament of road, and ascend and descend the high arch of the bridge like phantoms shaped in velvet.

And yet again there are boats that come from the city, laden with veiled women and flower-faced children, and slowly they steal across the water, every form and line reflected in its magic surface, till they touch the landing stairs,—as of old an Emperor might have done,—and so pass into the enchanted garden.

Nor is this all, for nearest of all, below the black marble throne, is the high stone wall of the garden with its vases filled with purple, and a pool with fountains set amidst the grass upon which the spray falls like mist. And upon either side of this there are far-reaching thickets of Persian lilac still in bloom.

Inside the Pavilion, from which all these wonders are meant to be seen, there is silence, and there are veiled shadows, and the wistful peace of a day that has gone for ever. In the place of the magnificent Lord who built it, of the mighty Emperor who claimed to hold the world in fee, of the lovely women chosen for their perfection to add the last touch to this place of superlative excellence, there are little sparrows building their nests under the fretted eaves, and rooks that chaffer within the inner court, and a dove sheltering from the summer noon.

Yet is this place not sad, like so many other relics of departed glory. The ferocity of Asia has not reached to this secluded corner, the dust and the havoc that appear in so many other places once the chosen of kings, have no power here over the beneficence of nature. The grass is as green,

the flowers are as bright and scented, the waters as sparkling, and the vision of the world without, as majestic and beautiful as they ever were in the days of the Mogul prime. There is but enough of decay, and of the touch of a vanished hand, to whisper of our frail mortality which turns to Dust. It does it so soothly that it falls like a benediction upon the spirit, and almost reconciles the soul to the inevitable.

NISHAT



CHAPTER IX

THE NISHAT BAGH

Gulzár-i-nishát u 'aish-i-dil há

The Nishat Bagh rises in a series of twelve terraces—the number of the Zodiac—from the water's edge, and is of a size and stateliness befitting the Mogul Court at the height of its splendour. Much of its architectural beauty has suffered from the passing of three hundred years since Asaf Khan, the brother of Nur Jahan and the father of Arjumand the Lady of the Taj, turned his accomplished mind to its construction; and many of its details have been lost or obscured in the vicissitudes to which so many of the princely tombs and palaces and gardens of that day have succumbed; and none more so than the tomb of Asaf Khan itself, which stands stripped of all its marbles, a worn skeleton by the railway track outside Lahore. Yet withal, this garden of his retains its perfection, and Time has even added splendour to its trees, now at the very climax of their lives.

It is indeed these trees which first and foremost appeal to one's unmeasured admiration. There are groves of them, and each is a giant of its princely race. Then there are the Great Terraces, as superb in their dignity and in their proportions as on the day they were made, and one cannot fail to admire the art with which they were designed to convey the impression of infinity, as of an endless series, passing into the high mountains which rise above them. The tenth terrace which marks the approach to the Zenana of the great nobleman, is the loftiest and most impressive of all, and it indicates the transition from the public to the secluded part of the Garden. "Behold the high wall which guards my Honour," it seems to say, "and respect its mandate." An octagonal throne surmounts it, and a great fall of waters plunges from it into the pool below. Here is the completion as it were of the third act of the drama of this spectacular garden.

On either hand of these stairs and fountains and thrones, and of the central stream that animates it, the garden melts away into orchards and secluded meads, so that its high boundary walls are hidden from sight. Here in these humbler days flocks of sheep graze under the apple trees, and amidst fields of snow-white Iris, adding their note of pastoral beauty to the formal stateliness of the garden.

At the far summit where of old the beauties of the Harem walked, there is a final belvedere which commands, without itself being seen, the whole reach of the garden to the Lake, and the world of loveliness beyond it. This innermost sanctuary is now in ruins; but most lovely at this season of early May, with its roof garden of flags, whose violet and purple glow like the robe of an Emperor through the sunlit screen of the chinars. At the wings also there are octagonal pavilions, from which to look out upon the countryside; but these are now in hopeless decay. Through holes and doorways in the back wall of the garden cattle steal in and graze where the ladies walked, and beyond this wall there is naught but the peasant hillside from which this princely garden was evolved.

All its secrets are now laid bare, and the stately mystery in which it was wrapped, whether as a work of Art or as the Sanctuary of one who was mighty and powerful in his day and generation, is no more. You may take a measuring tape and learn just how long and how broad this garden of his is, the number of its terraces, and the width of its inner chambers, and there is no corner of it into which you may not pry. Yet so fine and perfect is it in its design and character that you retain for it at all times a great respect.

For the rest; there are beds now of brilliant flowers, Guelder roses which droop under the weight of their own bloom, roses which sustain the fame of Kashmir by their perfection and luxuriant growth, honeysuckle on the high terrace walls, and daisies self-sown enamelling the grass. Time has destroyed much, but it has added such mellow qualities as time alone can give, and you feel this when you see old brick pavements, once so formal, now become a part of the earth itself, and billowing about the trunks of the great chinars, which were infants when they were laid in geometrical designs along the water courses.



BRAHMANS OF KASHMIR.

It would seem also that there is no garden in the world in which one is so free to do as one pleases. My breakfast was laid in this garden, as if it were my own, under the heavy shade of a chinar which stands alone by the fourth terrace in all the pride of its own loveliness. The grass below it was like a carpet, and the roof above me was a marvellous fabric of pointed leaves dappled with light and shadow, of grey boughs spotted like the cloudy leopard, and little spaces of blue sky. There was light, vivid and splendid, all about me, but none that directly penetrated this natural canopy. The hot sunlight, and the gentle zephyrs of the garden as they came blown in ripples across the lake, combined to provide me with an Elysian climate, while the plashing soaring fountains filled the garden with a mist, upon which there were graven all the colours of the prism.

Across the water from the City the boats stole one by one, landing their freight of sight-seers out for a day of pleasure. All these people came silently almost into the garden, women with babes carried high upon their shoulders, as you see them in the Bible pictures, and grave Brahmins who walked like princes, full of a cultured enjoyment of the garden, of the Guelder rose in her bloom, and the Persian Lilacs whose day was nearly over.

The noon quiet was made musical by the birds, the crooning ring-dove, the ecstatic bulbul, the oriole fluting his liquid note as he flew in flashes of gold from tree to tree. Upon the clover-scattered grass the hoopoes strutted, and the cock-sparrows danced in tense blandishments before their loves. The Head Gardener rose from his labours at the prescribed hours, and stood and knelt and lay prostrate upon his face in prayer, and the sound of his voice audibly conversing with his God was mingled with the rushing of the waters and the plashing of the fountains.

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The colour note of this garden is green and purple; its character majestic. Its proportions so noble, that notwithstanding the high mountains and precipices that rise so far above it, it conveys itself the sense of dignity and greatness. It has an air of Versailles, as of formal Majesty;

but more human, as Majesty is in the East. Yet it has many intimate and lovely haunts as well, as every garden should have.

To me, as I sat here, it seemed above all this to offer that exquisite something that an old-world garden in England has to bestow upon its votaries, upon that one day of Summer that attains Perfection.

Yet as I sat here and brooded upon the loveliness of the garden I learnt that there was yet one thing lacking to it; such an Eden I realized was not made for Man to walk in alone; and had I failed to discover this for myself, those secluded terraces yonder, and old Ronsard who lay beside me upon the grass, would have brought the knowledge to my ear. Moreover, there was the Spirit of the garden. This garden was destined by him who made it for a place of pleasure, and the soul which animated him haunts it still. It offers perfection; but only to one who will consent to share it with another.

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Towards sunset I took the *shikara* and made a little tour of the inner lake, where the splendid Lotus blooms in her season and reeds and lilies give shelter at all times to water-hens and the small lake terns. Here I found their eggs laid upon the surface of the lake. A thunderstorm came drifting over the valley and the castle of Hara Parbat, making marvellous pictures of light and shadow, and filling the reeds with wind. Yet the little terns rode secure upon their lily leaves, and their eggs lay exposed without harm to the elements. The young moon shone above the dark fragments of cloud, her image trembling in the water. By the pier-head where the waters of the garden fall in music into the lake, rows of earnest Moslems stood concluding their day's enjoyment in reverent prayer, their faces lit by the gathering storm. Along the road behind them passed the goat-herds with their silky flocks, on their way to the mountain pastures. Grey herons flew with slow rhythmic beat of wings between sky and water. Wonderful colours played upon the high cliffs whose image was reflected in the sombre waters. Many boats, laden with those who were returning to the city, made their way across the lake to the slow plashing of their oars. A few still lingered by the pier under the dark shadows of the chinar

trees, and far into the night the flames of their cooking fires glinted across the dark surface of the Lake, and the sound of their voices singing in unison was borne above the stillness.

Here and there only, a man sat alone, motionless, looking out into the darkling night, lost in contemplation, his heart filled with the mystery of life.



CHASHMA-SHAHI

CHAPTER X

CHASMA SHAHI

A SUMMER DAWN in Kashmir is a lovely thing, like a piece of music or some frail yet immortal verse. It comes in a wave of primrose over the peaks, and is followed by a divine radiance, as of heliotrope inspired with life or the awakening of a soul, and then by the sword-like glitter of Day, passing with the hours into a faint and misty remoteness. On the Lake itself are deep shadows and reflections, the silver gleam of oars, the glint of white stakes, the stooping forms of the weed-gatherers outlined darkly against the morning. The quay lies empty, and the last of the pleasure-seekers is stealing across the water in his boat, back to the toil of the City.

My own destination is the Chasma Shahi, or Royal Fountain, and I drive along the barred highway, with its tall poplars like a regiment in line, in the incomparable freshness of the morning. We presently come to an orchard in which I am fain to pause and gather a handful of cherries. For "*the cherry*," wrote the Emperor Jahangir in his memoirs, "*is a fruit of pleasant flavour, and one can eat more of it than of other fruits. I have in a day eaten up a hundred and fifty of them*"; an example that I am willing to emulate upon this fine Summer morning. And again, "*There was an abundance of Cherries on the trees each of which looked as it were a round ruby, hanging like globes upon the branches*"; which seemed to me a just observation.

At the Chasma Shahi Shah Jahan built a Pavilion, and laid out a little Persian garden with fountains and water-falls, in terraces lifted high above each other; and here one may still pass a day of enjoyment, and drink of the spring which gushes forth with the same purity and unfailing abundance as it did in his day. The old buildings with their Mogul

grace have passed away beyond recognition, and newer and less worthy ones built by the Maharajas of Kashmir have taken their place; but the beauty and seclusion of the spot survive. Here was never any pomp or ceremonial, but a place of exquisite repose; and so it continues to this day, haunted as of old by the Divinity of the Spring, and overlooked by mountains whose plumes are as the iridescent sheen of a peacock. Yet the place has a wistfulness, for the memories it holds of departed Kings.

Outside upon the rough hill-side the wild-rose blooms, the ploughman calls as of yore to his toiling steers; but for the Great, a glory has departed, and you feel this at the little garden in its loneliness on the hill-side.

Some way from it and very near the splendour of the Nishat Bagh, there is another such called the Chashma Hussain. It also has its spring and pool of pellucid water; its traces of old water courses and fretted stones, half buried in the fields; but no one seems to know who Hussain was. Some say he was a merchant from Ispahan, and others that he was a noble of the Court. It matters little. The water is there, and the green grass, and the wind blows as of old in the boughs of the great chinars that shadow it by the road.

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Towards evening I left for the Nasim Bagh, the sun blazing on the Lake. Boats in its light glowing like brass and doubled in the water, stole away, their colours fading with the sun, into violet shadows; while others moved like black velvet hearses carrying some dead man to his grave. The sun at last sank behind the yellow gilt-edged hills, and the whole circle of the lake gleamed with prismatic colours. The high crests of the Pir Pantsal had that remote and crystal air, as of great jewels beyond human attainment; and the benediction of evening settled upon the water, like the Peace which comes when life is over and passion is stilled.

Subha dar Bágh-i-Nishát
O Shám dar Bágh-i-Násim.

Morning at the Nishat Bagh
And Evening at the Nasim.

CHAPTER XI

THE NASIM BAGH

Az bihishte 'Adan Nasim ámad.

THE Nasim is the antithesis of the Nishat Bagh, not only as the couplet suggests but in its sentiment. For while the Nishat, with its rushing waters and sparkling fountains is still in the pride of life, the Nasim is a place overtaken by serene yet extreme old age. Its air is as of an Indian Summer, and an old red ox I saw there basking and dozing in the sun at the foot of an aged chinar seemed to me to embody its character. The spirit of the garden had entered into him and taken form.

Often described as the first of the Mogul gardens of Kashmir, and attributed to Akbar, it was actually laid out by Shah Jahan, within reach of his new city and castle of Nagar-nagar. It is now no more a garden ; but a beautiful old Park, with deep glades through which the sunlight and shadow fall upon its velvet sward. It has in its grand way a touch of Magdalen deer-park ; but it is less a work of Art. For one can measure its proportions and see right through it to the mauve waters of the Lake, and to the snow-spangled mountains beyond. The trees still beautiful are old and dying. Most of them are hollow, and their central trunks, if you look upward into the green majesty of their boughs, are black and withered, their life prolonging itself for a space in the great lateral branches—like the Empire in its decline. But in their youth it is said they were nourished with draughts of milk !

Its old containing walls that shut out the vulgar world have all but disappeared. You can trace them here and there, and their great foundations by the lake. Its fountains and conduits, its pavilions and belvederes, its gardens of roses, narcissus and lilac, have passed into soft swelling mounds and grassy hollows.

The Park lies open, a beautiful and ancient woodland, through which the lake breezes blow, making it the very abode of serene and tranquil peace, while its white iris clusters lend it an almost feminine charm. Nightingales sing in it, and doves murmur; rooks make their homes in its hollow trees, and the little sparrows feed undisturbed upon its lawns. Kites wheel above it in the blue bays and estuaries of sky. The cattle of the countryside wander through its glades, and sheep browse upon its herbage; while upon days of festival, and since it has long ceased to be the exclusive haunt of an Emperor which it were death to trespass upon, long files of the village people drift across it to the neighbouring *ziarat* of Hazrat Bal.

It is become a place to idle in, to ruminate in on the passing show and vanity of life. It makes no active claim upon one's senses, or upon the wells of one's surprise. It is a place of Benedictions, chanting softly in undertones its *Nunc Dimittis*; a place for those who have turned the sunny side of the hill, and see before them the long shadowy vale of evening with its quiet joys and subdued enjoyments; a beautiful mellow old place such as one might come upon in an ancient corner of England. Hence much loved by the English.

May it rest in peace.

NASIM



CHAPTER XII

HAZRAT BAL

How different is the scene at Hazrat Bal, when the people are gathered together there for the festival of the Prophet's hair! Far as one can see across the waters the boats are gathering; and every vantage point along the shore, where willows and chinars yield shelter from the blinding sun, is closely packed with the prows of their boats, each laden with its pilgrims and holiday-makers from the City. Many are bedecked with embroidered rugs and cushions, upon which friends sit together in harmony, with silver *huquahs* and musical instruments, and samovars and little cups of tea. The boats are bright with the faces of children, and in the humbler ones there are women to add their charm; while here and there a courtezan with her brazen glance and red lips makes way in her boat through the assembled crowd. The women of the upper classes stay sadly at home.

Before the Ziarat, in its great court under the chinar trees, a dense crowd is gathered for prayer, and there is scarcely room to stir. It is a quiet and orderly congregation which falls automatically into serried lines which culminate in those who are assembled upon the platform of the shrine, about the gilded litter in which is visible the person of the High Priest. Within, there are lights gleaming amidst the stately columns of Cedar that support the roof of the Ziarat. At intervals of space amidst the kneeling multitude, there stand eloquent preachers, whose purpose it is to address them in the articles of their faith, and to lead them in song.

The climax is reached when the whole mass of people rises and bends its head to the dust. In wonderful unison these waves of humanity rise and fall, as though inspired by but one volition. It is a strange and stirring sight, here, in the hot sunlight, and under the whispering shade of the great

chinar trees. And when the service is over and the Prophet's hair is held aloft, a milk-white dust ascends like incense from the soles of those who strain forward for a glimpse of the priceless relic, hiding the multitude from sight.

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At six o'clock in the evening I moved with the people across the silver-grey water to the Shalimar. There were countless boats upon the lake, and there was the sound of plashing oars, of voices singing, and of a people out for a holiday. The bright colours of the *shikaras*, with their pink and red and orange awnings, were reflected in the water, and the scene was one of the brightest animation. Our approach lay through shallow marshy waters, lined with pollard willows and covered with green scum, and it seemed an ignoble one to an Imperial garden; markedly inferior to that which takes one to the threshold of the Nishat Bagh. Its effect was of concealment, as if from fear. This cannot have been so in the days of Jahangir.

The Canal became gradually well-defined and bordered by stately chinars as we neared the garden; but here again the rice-fields of the peasantry had encroached upon its dignity. In by-gone days this narrow water must have been the scene of many a splendid ceremonial, and many a nobleman must have come slowly up it in his barge, with a superb equipment, but fear at his heart, lest he should fail in the presence of Majesty.

Even now something might be done to restore the beauty of this approach, by extending the avenue, sweeping the canal of its weeds, and restoring its brick foundations. The grass track beside might be laid afresh, and flowers planted beside it, while weeping willows might be made to take the place of the ugly pollards at the marshy junction of the canal with the waters of the lake. The outer walls and gates of the garden might be renewed. . . .

It was not till I reached the Diwan-i-Khas of Shah Jahan that the dignity of the garden fell upon me, and I ceased to question its fame. Here the black and green marbles were superb; and even in the dusk I could trace the amphitheatre of crags and mountains, and the snow-capped peak of Mahadev, which carry its beauty to a triumphant conclusion. Yet



FRIENDS AT THE SHALIMAR.

withal, this garden, this far-famed Shalimar, suggested to me a Pleasance, rather than an Imperial residence; which at one time it was. Its terraces, I could see, rose gently and almost imperceptibly above each other. It was a place, I thought, for a king to be happy in, to walk in with some lovely woman, to feast in of summer nights with his intimate friends, even to receive in with some state and splendour when his obligations made it imperative that his leisure should be invaded; but it did not give me the impression of a stately garden like the Nishat.

Its past seemed to linger in all that I saw before me; and the Shalimar I thought revealed the life of Jahangir and Nur Mahal—his Light of the Palace—of the indolent artistic and pleasure-loving Emperor, who would have given up the whole of his mighty empire were Kashmir but left to him; who placed the keys of his majesty in the fair hands of a woman; who wrote couplets upon a sudden inspiration, and fell into ecstasies over the glow and beauty of a cherry given to him to eat; who became intoxicated with wine o' nights, and went to bed in tears; yet was withal a King. Here as it seemed to me was not the Versailles of a Louis Quatorze; but the garden of a Prince who was above all a Lover, and of a man through whose temperament there ran the thread of an ineffective genius.

"I ordered a stream to be diverted, so that a garden might be made, such that in beauty and sweetness there should not be in the inhabited world another like it."

Memoirs of Jahangir.



THE SHALIMAR

CHAPTER XIII

THE SHALIMAR

Un des plus beaux jours de ma vie, as old Marbot would have said; for upon this day I saw the Shalimar at its best. The garden was thronged with the holiday-folk from yesterday's festival, the fountains were playing, and its stream, " like a river of Paradise," was here as tranquil as a summer's noon, there a cascade of silver quivering with light and animation as it fell in thunderous music into the shining pools.

The garden was indeed full of music this day; music of waters, music of doves, music of the little skylarks singing in the cages brought with them by the city people, music of the free nightingale high up in the green-gold tracery of the chinar trees, music of children's voices, and of those of the artistic pleasure-loving crowd who know so well how to enjoy so exquisite a place.

What perfect groups they made here by the silvery waters and under the shady trees! Here was one, a circle of friends playing cards upon the edge of the pool that surrounds the black marble of Shah Jahan's Pavilion, and upon the fringe of a lawn that was snow-white with daisies. They were so careful not to impinge upon its beauty.

Upon the flagged edge of the soft canal, resting their arms upon a carved pedestal of imperial days, were two little girls in blue and green, with the grace in miniature of grown women, poetic, with the unconsciousness of childhood in their forms and attitudes, gazing wistfully into the deeps where the waters spring into the pool below. Upon the corner of a terrace that was hung with roses, and shaded by a dark cypress tree, sat one who might have been old Omar himself, so tranquil and meditative was his figure, as of one who would see in the flowing stream, the passing of life, and in the roses as their petals fell and died, its brief conclusion.

Here upon the enamelled grass a rare group of women sat, with their babes about them, the rich colours of their garments reflected in the olive water with a thousand scintillations; here friends and associates climbed the garden stairs hand-in-hand, as in some picture of an old Persian garden; here one sat alone under the swaying boughs of a plane tree ineffably happy in the singing of his bird above him. A look of sympathetic delight lay upon his face; and when to test him I asked him if he would sell it, he replied, "O never Sir! it is my Love, my *Ashik*, the joy of my heart." So it was, and when he took it away an hour later he enveloped its cage in yet another cover of flowered chintz, while he drew a third from under his robe, to show me the extent of his solicitude.

Here were groups like Abraham and his posterity about the base of a great chinar that had seen three hundred years of life.

If trees could speak what might these superb creatures, whose hospitality we enjoy and pass on, tell us of the wonders of this garden, and of the passions it has known!

For there are some here that knew the Mogul Empire in its prime; that grew here in the days of Jahangir and Nur Mahal, and lent their shade to the magnificent Shah Jahan. Every yard of this garden is filled with memories of some of the mightiest and the loveliest of this earth. Their names and their fame remain; but of their blood only a few survive, some in exile beyond the seas, and others in poverty amidst the dust of those sun-tortured plains. . . .

But the humble survive; and an old gardener told me that as far back as his family had any recollection they had worked upon the soil of the Shalimar, drawing no pay; *adscriptes glebae*.

"In the days of Shah Jahan the Padishah," he said, "nine hundred gardeners were employed at the Shalimar, but now we are only twenty one."

This old man was full of wisdom and a sort of gentle philosophy. In the course of his ministrations he swept away a whole field of daisies that blossomed before me.

"You deserve to be hanged," I suggested.

He smiled benevolently and replied, "So be it, Huzoor; but you will

have to bring me back to life again, for in ten days they will be more plentiful than ever." . . .

The City folk who come here for a holiday deeply appreciate the beauty and charm of the Shalimar. None ever commits an offence against good taste, and hence it comes that there are no "Verboten." Trespassers are not warned to keep off the grass, and there is no head-gardener with a sour face, or policeman to keep the law.

So it came that I was at liberty to bring my books and a chair, and sit all day in the garden, even to the extent of having my meals served there from the boat beyond the walls; as if it were my own.

These things are possible here in this Garden of a dead Emperor, because the people who use it from generation to generation, have the priceless gift of refinement in the intercourse of life. When they come here they become a part of the garden; and when they have gone, the garden smiles on as if they had never been. Think of Hampstead after a bank holiday!

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Evening at the Shalimar. Evening had now come, and the last ray of sunlight had gone with the last of the pleasure-seekers. A wonderful peace descended upon the Shalimar. Its fountains were stilled, and its great cascades no longer filled the pavilions with their music as of the sea. But the birds still sang on, the murmuring doves and the ecstatic nightingale, and the after-glow of the sunset flushed the mountain crags that overlook the garden with indescribable madder and rose, while Mahadev soared up with the lustre of a Dolomite peak. The waters still lingered in the pools about Shah Jahan's pavilion, still as a mirror; and in their shallow depths were reflected the black marble and finished grace of a by-gone day, and the drooping foliage of this season's chinars.

I passed out by a wicket beyond the garden walls, where is the little stream to which it owes its life. The high aqueduct of Imperial days which bore it loftily across the countryside, is no longer used, and the present channel fittingly follows a more lowly course through the fields and hamlets of the people, which it waters when not required at the Shalimar. Here

the hereditary gardeners have their freeholds, and in the twilight across their acres, under the willow trees, I could see their burying places white with iris. Here, as ever in the East, I found that sharp contrast between the common world that lies open to the eye, and the splendid seclusion of the Great—on one side of the garden wall, Nature, brutal and harsh as in the plains of India, gentle and unadorned as here; on the other, Art, inspired by the enthusiasm and splendour of an Imperial race.

Long after the darkness had fallen, and the birds had ceased to sing, and the stars had begun to shine, I found the hereditary gardeners at work, by lamplight, transplanting their flowers in the cool night and irrigating the grassy spaces. The waters of the canal continued also to run, though the stream was cut off, and the cascades in the lower garden to murmur; for the great reservoirs take several hours to empty themselves.

I dined in the south colonnade of Shah Jahan's pavilion, whose marble still retained the warm and vital glow of the sunlight that had beaten upon it, long after the chill of night had fallen; and for an hour after that I sat by the pool's edge under the green marble pillars of the northern colonnade, facing the serrated mountains and the white peaks. So bright was the starlight that the mountain-wall was almost luminous, and the snow-fields of Mahadev were clearly visible as such, yet wrapped in the mystery of the night, and set as it were with the stars for jewels. I could see reflected in the waters the dark forms of the cypresses and the hosts of Heaven, and as I looked the earth moved and the constellations rose in the vault above me, and new stars emerged from moment to moment into vision.

Afar off, outside the garden walls, I could hear the rippling music of the stream, and the voices of the night, in such undertones as commonly pass for stillness; and when a light passed at the far end of the garden, a small thing flickering like a glow-worm, its reflections lit up the beautiful tracery on the pedestals of the marble columns, so polished was their surface.

The mystery of the Night enveloped me, and the life of Shah Jahan rose up before my eyes, so that I saw in the darkness the gleam of his tents, the silken awnings over this his summer pavilion, the light in his inner chamber; a frail boat upon the canal below the pavilion, rich carpets upon



NIGHT AT THE SHALIMAR—THE EMPEROR SHAH JAHAN

the floor, and heavy curtains of velvet between the side rooms and the central chamber. I saw the magnificent Emperor rise from his couch and look out upon the jewelled night, his mind vexed by some political anxiety though his soul rejoiced in the splendour of the firmament above him. His face was the face of an Emperor, but also of an Artist; as sensitive as it was proud and imperious, and lit with the high vision of the creative mind. He had made more exquisite his father's Shalimar, he was yet to accomplish, through the gateways of sorrow, the masterpiece of the world.

“Alas, how fares my pleasure-house to-night?
Sway Zahi's waters to the warm night breeze?
And do the soft doves with their old delight
Murmur dear mysteries in the olive trees?”

Mútamid, King of Seville.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ISLE OF CHINARS

I WOKE at dawn at the Isle of Chinars. The sun was long in rising above the eleven thousand feet of Mahadev; but his advent was heralded by shafts of light which shot upward through the white puffs of cloud, and bathed in a golden glamour the opposite castle of Hara Parbat and the snow-white Pir Pantsal. The lake was like a burnished mirror in which all things were imaged, from these luminous wonders to the dark olive shadows of the mountains that frown above the Nishat Bagh.

The Isle offers a beautiful vantage point for a survey of the entire lake, but it is sad with memories of departed glories. Of its four chinars, one has long since gone, another lifts its maimed trunk in the last stages of its dissolution, a third still soars magnificently up above the tranquil waters, though decay has seized its vitals, the fourth alone is yet in its vigorous prime, having apparently been planted on the death of its forerunner. Lovely as is the scene that awaits one here at dawn, when the whole of this secluded corner of the world is bathed in the radiance of a new day, the impression it conveys is one of profound melancholy; so lone is the little island, so shattered are all its human associations.

One can see that this small and solitary place was designed for pleasure, for the reception of singers and dancers, of an outer multitude of guests upon the water; or, it might be, for the retreat of lovers, who would be of the world, but would have it solely to themselves. But its last human tenant half a century ago was an ascetic, who sat brooding on the emptiness of life in the hollow of the dying chinar, and even he has gone, and the hooded crows alone find a habitation where Jahangir and Nur Mahal dallied with life, and nightingales are reputed to have sung. Even the marble

pavilion with its white colonnades that graced the island in the days of our own early travellers, the practical Vigne and the sentimental Hugel, has gone, and the harsh ruins of the terraced platform from which it rose, only detract from what might otherwise be a happy little pastoral island, or soft meadow of daisies scattered amidst the grass. Nowhere else upon the shores of this lake, where the transitoriness of Power is so strikingly yet beautifully portrayed, does one feel its tragedy as here. The character of the exquisite isle has vanished as completely as that Viceroy of Kashmir, who at the height of a festival upon the island, and in the midst of all that could please his sense and flatter his pride, was summoned away by the voice of a royal messenger, to meet his fate at the hands of his enemies.

It was not till Night had fallen that the painful emotions that brood about the island became stilled, and that I was able to enter into its loveliness. Then there came as it were a renascence of its earlier life. The sky became jewelled with stars, a young crescent moon hung over the Nasim Bagh, and the surface of the lake was calm as Nirvana itself. The mountains beyond Til Bal were of so diaphanous a blue, where they projected like some headland into the Ocean, that they seemed divested of all that was material save their form alone; and the white summits and vast barrier of the Pir Pantsal were yet fainter, like the visions of a dream. Lights burnt under the dark water-line of the Nasim, where some boats lay at anchor, and a twinkling came from the shrine of the Prophet's Hair, with the sound of plaintive voices, intoning some litany of the night.

Solomon's Throne stood up like a shadow in the starry night, and the high ramparts of Hara Parbat strung their battlements against the gloom, but of the city of a hundred and thirty thousand souls that lay between them—the Capital of Kashmir—there was no hint, neither in light nor sound. The City was as completely veiled as though it had never been.

The Island stands in the deepest and most open part of the lake, and the clear waters encompass it like a sea. A tense silence engulfs it and broods over it in these dark hours, and this night there was not so much as the rustle of a leaf in the trees overhead.

Yet the stars shone with an amazing brilliance, and the universe moved upon its appointed course.

FATE AND THE PLEASURE-LOVER



CHAPTER XV

HABBAK

THE terraces of Habbak catch the eye from afar, and when one arrives at the garden one realizes that this was in plan and purpose the most stately of all the old Mogul gardens on the lake. Its ruined walls and outer bastions, its far-flung terraces and steep waterfalls, its carved waterways and sunk pools, still linger in all the sadness of failure to remind one of those departed days. Here more than elsewhere upon the borders of this Elysian lake one is struck with the Havoc that is the twin of Splendour in the East. All the old buildings have gone; the graven stones that lent their aid to the music of falling waters are shattered beyond repair, and the channels in which the waters of the garden glided as they still do at the Shalimar, are choked with weeds.

Yet in their midst the Roses of a past age still struggle to live; yet are there beautiful places in this Garden of Desolation. If you place yourself at its centre, upon its loftiest terrace where two dark and aged Cypresses still stand sentinel, you will see about you fields of scarlet poppies—loved flowers of life—the far lake shining below, and the snow-spangled mass of Mahadev rising like an Alp into the mist of the morning sunlight.

Who made this garden and when? and why has Death overtaken it, in defiance of all its pride of place, of its high walls and princely terraces?

The story as told me by Pundit Anand Kaul of Kashmir is as follows:

In the years 1665 to 1668, in the days of the Emperor Aurangzeb, there ruled in Kashmir as Governor for the Mogul Empire, one Saif Khan, a great nobleman who was seized with a passion for creating here a garden that would excel in beauty and grandeur even the Shalimar and the Nishat Bagh. He

brought from the Sindh Valley a stream to water his garden, after the Persian manner, and to give its life to its fountains, its grottos and its cascades. But before his design was fully accomplished, one greater than he, his master the Emperor, recalled him to Delhi. The groves of chinar trees, and the alleys of Cypress that were to have graced it, remained unplanted, or languished from the lack of sustenance. The garden having thus remained shadowless, a Poet wrote of it in irony

Sayih gar nist Saifábád rá
Mitwan paighambare bághát guft,

which being interpreted means

Saifabad has got no shade
Let us call it the Prophet amongst Gardens.

After Aurangzeb the Empire waned and died, and there was no one who took any account of Saifabad till in the year 1870, the Maharajah Ranbir Singh of Kashmir in one of those fits of commercial endeavour to which Indian Princes are liable, started here, where a garden was to have bloomed, flour and rice-pounding mills worked by water power and prisoners from the jail, for a profit. Then came an abortive Silk Factory; and in the end Peace once more descended upon the ruins of the garden of Saif Khan.

CHAPTER XVI

TYL BAL

FROM the ruined pleasaunces of Saifabad, with all their emotional appeal, I passed in a *shikara* up the Arrah river, and found my House-boat that had come slowly away from the Isle of Chinars, moored in a shady corner under willow trees. Here I passed the day amidst the quiet surroundings of rural life, upon a secluded water that is the abode of tranquillity and unconditional peace. On either bank there is a footpath shaded by close lines of young willow trees, through whose light and shadow the people pass; one with a hoe to his labour in the fields, another with his pipe and a companion to beguile the way, another a woman with her infant seated, bright-eyed, upon her shoulders and observant of the world. Along the stream which flows at so gentle a pace that it suggests eternity as available for the accomplishment of a life's purpose, a boat now and then passes laden with grass and fuel or bricks from the City, whose owner with a placid joy upon his face sings some Kashmiri love-song in an undertone that matches his mood and the sentiment of the little river. Along the banks under the green and gold of the willows, a black cow moves a few yards every hour, grazing the rich herbage by the water, a hen with her brood struts up and down, and a family of geese cackle contentedly, their white beauty imaged in the river's green surface. Away in the fields beyond the countless stems of the willow trees a man's head with a white cap on it bobs up and down as he plies his hoe, and under the shade of a mulberry by a cottage wall, his children are busily and happily at work, the lad plying his needle—for it is a man's occupation in these parts—the little girl at a spinning-wheel, and the baby gazing with large eyes at the footpath upon which strange things

happen. Hoopoos of King Solomon and Golden Orioles flash amongst the willows, and doves croon all through the summer hours.

Forgotten here are memories of departed greatness, the swing and purpose of the world. For here is a little corner, such as you might look for by an English river or a Dutch Canal, with the impress on it of infinite quiet and leisure and unnumbered days.

Late in the evening of this day, when the shadows were lengthening and the sunlight was sweeping in great waves over the valley, I followed the little river up towards its source. It runs but a brief course from its snowy sources to the lake edge, and at each step it becomes more delicious, its green waters more transparent, its temperature nearly as cold as that of ice. Upon its banks I found many a charming homestead, with cows about, and silky goats, and pretty children, and bare-legged women husking rice; and at one secluded corner I came upon a Ziarat, a sort of religious idyll, hidden by the river's brink under the shelter of the noblest trees of the valley. Within, in the cloistral silence and peace of the enclosure, there were the shrines of dead saints, like little dolls'-houses, with jasmine growing through the roof, and coloured threads at the lattice marking the vows of women eager for a babe, and little *chirags*, the earthen lamps of the humble, with a pebble in each to save the oil—an economy that might amount to the hundredth part of a penny. There was here also a mosque with wild roses, irises and fritillaries growing about it, and a chain before its door, which those who wish to be understood as speaking the truth, in a land in which lies trip so easily off the tongue, hold fast while they call upon their Prophet to witness to their veracity. Even in this humble place the soul strives dimly after the perfection of which it knows, and makes its unceasing appeal for union with its God.

Leaving the *shikara*, which could travel no further by reason of the increasing speed of the water as it swept over the pebbly shallows, I crossed the bordering rice-fields to the village of Burzihama, and the high uplands above, where I could see that I had reached an earlier age in the life of the valley. And here appropriately were great monoliths, like Druid altars, relics of that distant time. Looking down upon the lake spread before me, and the river-levels of the Jhilam, and then to these intermediate lands

that lie between mountain and valley, I realized that man must have been here long before the lake of Kashmir swept over the impeding gorge at Baramulla. I had a vision of the landscape as he saw it in those remote days; the Great Lake spreading like a greater Leman from mountain foot to mountain foot, and rough hamlets upon its fringe and upon the fan-shaped spaces where the side-valleys broadened to the lake; while Solomon's Throne and Hara Parbat rose like islands above its surface. So versatile is this vale of Kashmir; so swiftly does one pass from impression to impression, from waters as still as glass to rushing streams and rapids, from green and gold haunts by secret margins, to these open uplands, where the sun blazes, and cattle pasture in the open day!

Nor was the feast of variety at an end, for turning away from here I followed the stream to its junction with the waters that passing from it inspire the Shalimar and still give it life. These waters that once they enter the garden are bent to the will of an Emperor, and are made to play over marble, and fall in cascades over compartments of light, here run with a joyous exuberance in and out amongst the willow trees, flush with green margins, grinding the wheels of flour-mills, bordered with wild roses and the white iris that blooms above the bones of dead men.

At Harwan still higher up they have been trapped to fill a lake of drinking water which now supplies the City; a work as characteristic in its purpose and execution of the British temperament as the Shalimar was of that of the splendid Mogul. The hamlets that once filled this valley of Dachigam have been removed, and a natural Park is now growing up under the superb heights of Mahadev, where the brown bear and the great Kashmir stag are protected, as well as other lesser creatures of the wild. Here now is a superb amphitheatre, with the lake as its arena, wrapt in the stillness of a place that is forbidden to men.

CHAPTER XVII

NAGINA BAGH

THE Nagina Bagh lies upon a secret water, which is like a lake within a lake, and I came upon it by hazard one afternoon when the sun, blazing over the Dal, compelled an escape to some quieter and more sheltered spot. A canal by the bridge of Kraliyar carried the *shikara* into this side water and landed us at the stairs under two aged chinars, which mark the entrance to the Nagina Bagh. Here we enjoyed the reflections of mountain and woodland in the still deep waters; and in the evening cool walked up the main thoroughfare of the old garden, through its avenue of chinars, and its fields of poppied corn, to the far containing-wall half-hidden under scented acacias.

A slumberous stillness, broken only by the murmuring of doves, lies upon this secluded garden, far as it is from the frequented highways of the lake. Its old buildings, its pavilions and water-courses and flagged ways have all departed, its terraces lie hidden under grass, its formal beauties under the waving corn; yet it retains the sentiment of vanished days. One knows that the half-finished villa, and the patch of garden by the water which mark its present ownership, form no part of its inherent character. For the spirit that dwells here in this quiet place is the spirit of some old Mogul whose body long since ceased from being, and now lies mingled, it may be, with the dust of some distant burying-place in the plains of India.

The world that encloses it is of entrancing beauty and peculiar to itself. It faces the Takht-i-Sulaiman, whose image dreams at its feet in the tranquil waters. Upon its right, as one looks upon this beautiful reflection, there is the castled hill of Hara Parbat, and beyond it the whole majesty and Arctic splendour of the Pir Pantsal. The garden runs parallel as it were

to this line of marvellous peaks and snowy spaces, which even in the dazzling glare and glow of the May sunlight look cold and pitiless as ice. On its left there is the sun-warmed peak of Mahadev and the whole line of mountains which over-hang the Nishat Bagh and the Shalimar, and brood in their splendour over the northern and eastern shores of the Dal lake. Late in the evening, when the sun is nearly gone, they are seized with a passionate glow of colour, that is of crystalline red or crimson, peculiar to them at this transitory moment; and it is here in the cool deeps of this inner water about the Nagina Bagh that one may look to perfection upon their motionless reflections.

The startling colours fade, as if the glow which animates them were too ardent to last for more than a few rapturous moments; the stars shine out, and Hara Parbat, outlined against the sky, ceases for one instant to be the proud citadel of a kingdom, and becomes in its amethystine loveliness the gossamer castle of some Faëry Queen.

These wonders may be seen even by careless eyes, on a summer night, as one's boat passes slowly over the waters, on its homeward course from the Nagina Bagh to the exit of the Dal Lake.

Not far from here, and secluded from observation, there may still be traced the canal along which Jahangir and Nur Jahan travelled o' moon-lit nights to their garden named the Illahi Bagh. Jahangir was a man of fancies like Ludvig of Bavaria, and there is a legend that his gilded pleasure barge was towed upon these occasions by a bevy of damsels of the Harem, the bells upon whose ankles made a music in the night.

CHAPTER XVIII

SOLOMON'S THRONE

At early dawn in the month of May, when the birds were just beginning to sing, I came along the shadowy poplar avenues to the foot of this hill; which from the earliest times of which there is record has been a symbol of piety to the people of the City. It was here, as is generally believed, that Jalauka, the son of Asoka,

> "Who by the white stucco of his fame made spotless the Universe,"

built the shrine of Jyestharudra over twenty centuries ago. Men have prayed here, and fought here with their backs to the great hill and in the shadow of the shrine in all these intervening years: and it remains to this hour the great land-mark of the City, and a magnet of the Soul. It is the place in all the valley from which to see Kashmir. I had not climbed far when the snowy peaks which engirdle the valley broke upon my vision; yet faintly in the exquisite and elusive tints of morning. The main incidents of the valley itself were also to be seen, the river and the meadows and the trees, the roof-tops of the homes and the habitations of men. I climbed on, resisting the fascination of the view till I should reach the summit. Here and there a *chikor* broke from cover, one standing defiantly against the sky-line issuing his challenge to his peers, while another at my approach flung himself with intrepid wing upon the abysses which fall to the level of the plain. The grace and daring of his flight obsessed my mind as I toiled slowly, foot by foot, and inch by inch, upwards to Solomon's Throne.

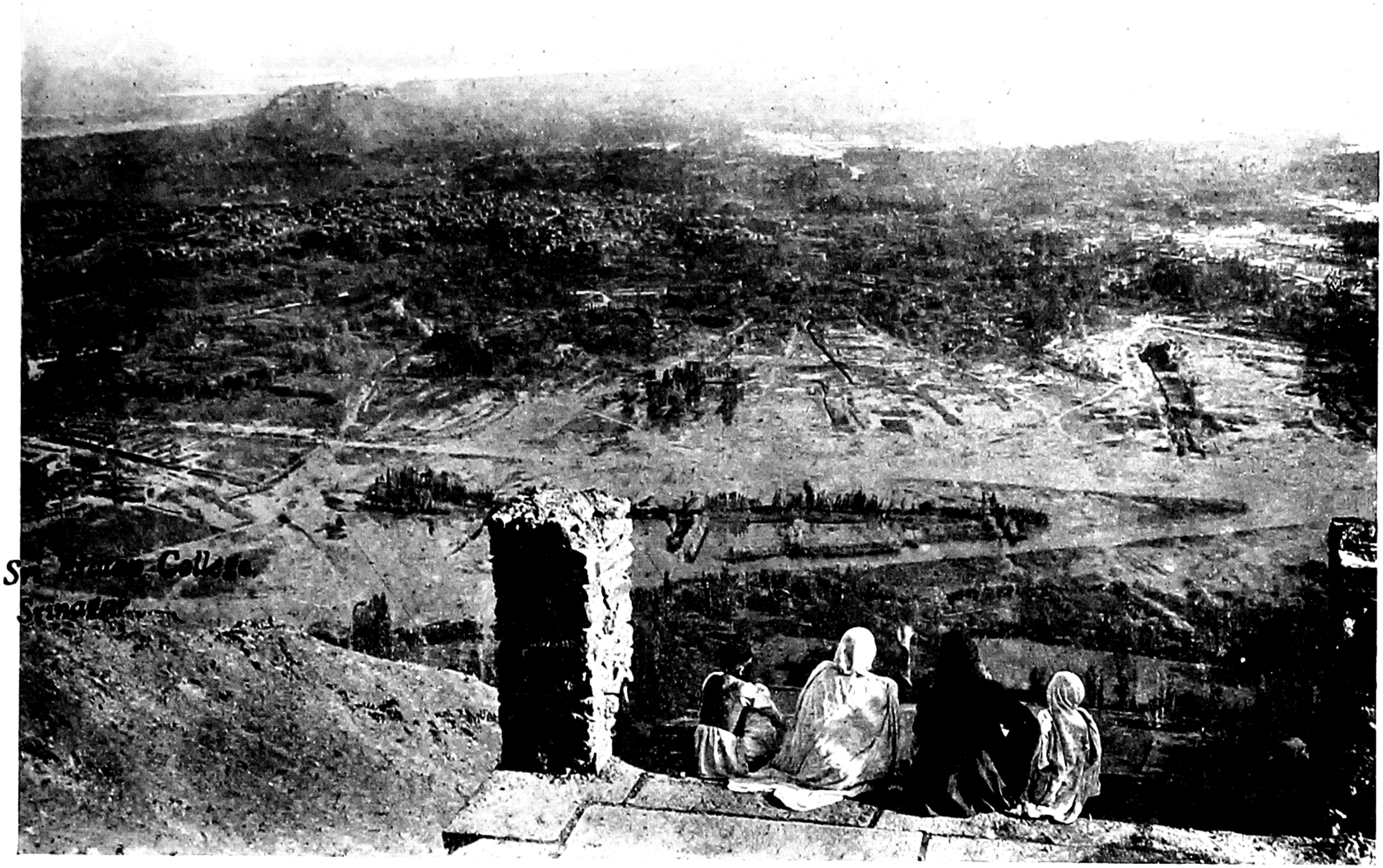
The opposite Peaks were now a-glitter with unmistakeable sunlight, and the long waves of gold came descending towards me from their majestic

heights, first past the uplands and forests of far Gulmarg, then to the level shores of the ancient lake which once filled the valley, and so from moment to moment, subtly, as if driven by some zephyr of the Gods, over the lucent pools and marsh lands, the rice-fields in whose humble surface the glory of the snows was mirrored, the lines of poplars which marched like a serried army across the plain; and so to that which is the soul and impulse of the valley, the River, winding in voluptuous coils of beauty, here brooding in violet shadows, there radiant and shining in the amber and gold of the sun.

By the time I had reached the summit of the hill and the foot of the Temple, whose superb foundations of cut and fashioned stone were laid here in days when the shadows that precede civilisation still lay heavy over Northern Europe, the sun was topping the Eastern Mountains that contain the valley, and the temple of Jyestharudra glowing as if born anew in his warmth was sending its shadow with that of the thousand feet of rock upon which it stands visibly across the plain.

There in the sunlight clustered the red and tawny house-tops of Srinagar, reaching away to Akbar's Castle and the fortress of Hara Parbat in serried masses, and feeling their way in more scattered *echelon* across the shallows and water-ways, to the floating gardens and purple spaces of the Dal. Here the sunlight had not yet reached, and I looked upon a fragment of the world that was yet asleep. On the River, life had begun; the life of Man—for the procession of Nature, the images of heaven and the stars, sunlight and moonlight, are never absent from its fellowship. Boats were creeping down its tranquil waters, here gliding without a trace upon its current, there fretting it for a moment in transit across its surface from shore to shore. The poplar avenues, the great chinars, the apple trees and orchards, each formed their image in its surface, and a lone tree by its banks was doubled as in a dream.

From these humble lights my eyes passed once more to the circumambient glory of the mountains, and in the clear radiance which enshrines them at this early hour, I could trace each snowy peak and summit and white-shrouded pass from Tatakuti at the far eastern end of the girdle to Nanga Parbat the high summit of a world, and nearer at hand, at the very



MORNING SCENE AT THE TAKHT-I-SULAIMAN.
THE CITY AND THE LAKES A THOUSAND FEET BELOW.

threshold of the risen sun, to stately Haramukh, veined and splashed with silver. And while I was yet lost in the beauty of the morning, and the splendour of the world, the slow chanting voice of the priest of the Temple issued from within its precincts, and in the golden sunlight I saw assembled a party of pilgrims, gathered from distant corners of the earth, about this shrine of immemorial years.

" Oh, comrade, fall aside
And think a little moment of the pride
Of yonder sun, think of the twilight's net."

Abu'l-Ala.

CHAPTER XIX

ASOKA'S CITY

The little temple of Pandrethan stands by the wayside, a mile or two up the river, where it curves in wide beauty at the foot of the Takht-i-Sulaiman. One might easily pass it by unnoticed, for it is sheltered from the high-road by a woodland of slim trees, through which the evening sun glows each day in bars of green and gold. A little stream meanders through this grove, and so falls murmuring into the river, as it has done since the days of Asoka the king; more lasting in its frailness than all the mighty works of man.

This stream has its birth in a clear spring in the court of the Temple, about which it is now suffered to wander at will, filling its interior. Fragments and outlines of the old containing walls of the Temple enclosure can still be traced; but no longer do they serve their purpose of keeping intruders at bay, and the water-logged soil about the altar is pitted with the hoof-prints of the cattle that wander in here unchecked.

Amidst these surroundings the little temple stands forlornly beautiful. with the benediction of time upon it, and the soft glow of each evening's sunlight to warm it into momentary life. The columns and capitals of the temple are dulled in their old chiselled beauty by the usury of centuries of wind and weather; but the stone blocks of which the roof is composed, though shaken from their appointed place, and awaiting the hour of their dissolution, are still as smooth and sharply cut and perfect as upon the day they left the hand of their maker. Yet how softened in their colours by the passage of a thousand years!

Within, the roof retains its pristine forms, its circular lotus or wheel, which four figures at each corner sustain in its swift revolution, and its bold presentment of Vishnu, instinct with life and power. How many

have come here from the City of a summer evening to gaze upon its wistful beauty, how few seem to care to prolong its hour, or embellish its court, where the straggling stream runs its soiled and neglected course! So little would convert it into a clear pool, in the midst of which the temple could dream away its remaining years.

On the uplands above it lie the buried ruins of Asoka's City of Srinagari, the ancient Capital, overlaid with soft turf and fields of iris which here as throughout the valley mark the resting-place of the dead. At one end some recent excavations have exposed the base and what remains of a Buddhist Stupa. . . .

It was from this spot, stored with memories of bygone days, that seemed yet to linger about these shattered remains, that I saw the sun setting in a sheet of gold between the dark outline, upon the one side, of the Takht-i-Sulaiman, and on the other of the great mountains, his shafts of light reaching out in radial bars symmetrically across the sky, like The Wheel of the Divine Law.

A deep silence lay upon the scene, unbroken by any sound. I stood here upon the grave of a dead city, lost in the Nirvana of the setting sun, and when, after I know not what interval of time, I turned away from its pageantry to look once more upon the shattered ruins behind me, I was startled as by the living presence of two feet, and the hem of an Eastern robe, which seemed to be coming towards me bathed in the glow of the level sunlight. And then I saw that they were but the fraction of a statue of the Buddha, that had been unearthed, and left here from the general destruction.

It was a wonderful evening, wonderfully soft after recent rain, and the snow-white peaks, which claim as of right the homage of the traveller from every point of vantage in this valley, seemed here to have quietly withdrawn, to leave the dead city its moment of benediction from the sun, who knew it in its splendour, in the days when the faithful Asoka was lord of the Indian world.

"Last loneliest loveliest exquisite apart."



TRAVELLERS IN KASHMIR

CHAPTER XX

MANAS BAL

I HAD seen Manas Bal at evening on my journey up the river. I desired to look upon its beauty once more before leaving the Valley, to sleep by its side, and enter into the intimacy of its companionship. I drove out to it therefore on the evening of my last day but one at the Capital, and the memory of this visit is one that I would willingly retain. My road lay at first along the great highway of the valley, with its serried lines of poplars on either hand, its lane of blue sky above these mighty walls of foliage that closed in the distant vista like the nave of a gothic cathedral, and its bars of light and shadow that lay across it like a weaver's pattern. Even in France and Lombardy there is nothing more symmetrically perfect than this.

There were many other travellers abroad, some bound for India, urgent and speeding along in carts and *tongas*, others the slow quiet people of the country-side to whom *this* is the highway of their lives, stately women moving towards the City from the fields, and men behind their cattle with the stained implements of their toil. In the branches of the meeting poplars there was now and then the murmur of a dove; now and then the sudden flight of an oriole, like living gold. It was a world in itself.

And then we left it abruptly for a soft open road of the country, lined for miles with the small purple iris of Kashmir, and bordered on either hand by spreading fields. Here as we approached the river there were shrines and *ziarats*, and women filling their water-pots in the flush of the evening sunlight, and the sunset flaming down like the light from a great reflector out of the marshalled pearl and opal of the clouds. Here were flocks of sheep and long silky-haired goats in the meadows by the rice-

fields, and so at length we came to the rambling wooden bridge at Sambal, where the river rushes between the piers and the laden cargo boats fight for a passage-way.

At Nanni-nara on the further shore, a storm which had been gathering all the afternoon overtook us with thunder and lightning; the winds of Heaven were let loose, and night closed in with pomp and majesty of sound.

Rapidi fremitus et murmura magna minarum. Large drops of rain fell, and the storm circled with superb and sweeping dominion over the dark mountains, the white head of Haramukh, and the cowering city.

In the deadly stillness and tense silence which followed this passionate outburst, as though Nature had seized upon all the vital forces and swept them along in the storm, I decided to sleep out under the stars, upon a ledge under a great chinar that overlooked the shimmering waters of the lake. Here I was presently joined by the Headman of an adjoining hamlet, the Village Watchman and a *Shikari* from Nanni-nara. These good people spoke of their several avocations, of flocks and herds and the spring crops, of the peace and confidence that had settled upon the country side since " Laren " came—(Sir Walter Lawrence who made the Revenue settlement and for the first time in history perhaps gave the unfortunate peasant of this valley his rights)—of their perception of the ill of untruth, and of their sins which in the past they said had rightly brought upon them misfortune; of their dependence upon the will and clemency of God.

One can tell that this is a sad people, who have borne for centuries with grief; who have learnt to bend their heads to the storm, and have grown twisted and crooked in the process; yet in whose hearts there survives a perception of the purposes of God, and an increasing desire to rise once more into the sunlight of nobler men.

I endeavoured to induce the Headman and his Watchman to return to their homes; but they assured me that they could not do so while I slept in the open; so in somewhat singular company, for the son of a deceased Fakir and a Bartimaeus from the vicinity had surreptitiously joined the party, I passed the night under the stars.

I awoke to find the night accomplished and day at hand. The birds were astir, and the stars in their altitudes aware of the coming of the Sun

were withdrawing into the luminous mysteries of space. Venus alone burnt clear over the gateways of the Dawn, chosen for her excelling beauty to meet the Sun upon the threshold of the morning.

Soon even her loveliness waned and was lost in the triumphant coming of the God. The far snows flushed and flamed with Flamingo pink, most lovely at this the earliest hour of light. The swinging world accomplished its mighty evolution with the serene and perfect poise that comes from a master-hand; and in silence the great drama of the opening day was carried to its superb conclusion.

Life now became vocal in the singing of the birds, and their amours graced the idyllic hours. The sun appeared over the rim of the green hills that border the lake, and flashes of his light fell with a sudden beauty upon the tranquil surface of its waters. The boatmen rose up, and turning with a profound spiritual impulse, such as has almost gone out of our modern life, performed the solemn act of worship.

It had been a perfect night, windless and star-lit, and shining in its earlier hours with the radiance of the waxing moon. Once when I woke to sleep again I saw her riding serenely in the clear firmament above me, her dark shadows falling upon the turf. A deep stillness lay at that hour upon the waters and the mountains and the trees; yet was there some mystic influence abroad, as of the world's heart beating in the night watches.

When I looked about me in the morning light and surveyed my sleeping-place, I found that it was one of a series of green terraces that had once marked the beauty of an Imperial Garden. I had slept here in the midst of these remnants of departed glory, and a cut in the hill-side that I had vaguely noticed in the dark as a place to be avoided, was now disclosed as the ruin of a water-fall that had once gleamed and murmured for an Emperor's pleasure.

The stream that once animated it I found still flowing swiftly and silently on its way above the topmost terrace, under the sheer rocky walls of a mountain of Mediterranean hues. Here scattered over its surface, as I have so often seen them on the shores of the Inland sea, was a flock of goats moving to the barking of a dog and the cries of the goat-herds, while somewhat in the rear came the young kids, and the wounded and

sickly members of the flock, limping over the rocks. Yet here I felt as I never feel out of the East, that all these creatures were one, the herd and its owners; that they were all of kin, and that but one soul beat through them all.

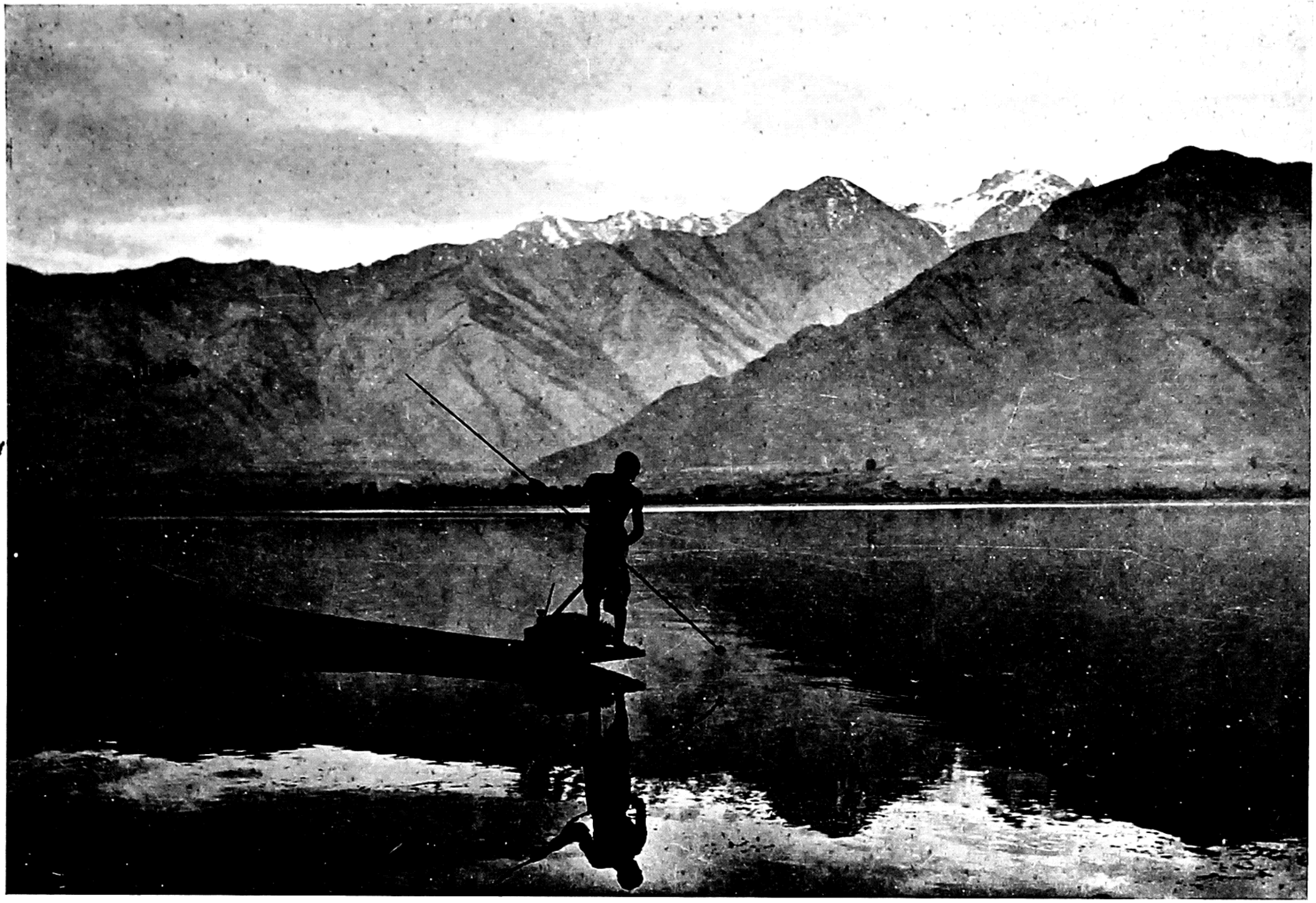
By the lake edge in the yellow sunlight stood an old stone temple of classical form that was almost submerged, and the waters gleaming about it were as clear as glass. In those bygone days in which it was built, it must have stood upon the shore, and at morning and at evening some priest must have laid his flowers upon its altar, and chanted his litany. That it has survived the iconoclasm of subsequent ages may be due to its seclusion here, upon the rim of this secluded water; or to its very smallness, which left it as it were beneath contempt.

We crossed the Lake, and as I looked down into its tranquil depths, in which the form and outline of the boat were mirrored, I saw that we but skimmed for a passing instant the surface of a world of hidden and secret beauty that lives on its own undisturbed life regardless of such transitory incidents. From the bottom of the lake, where it was shallow, a forest of weeds like Firs in form and outline, rose up through the lucent waters, and in this strange country the fish glanced and darted about the business of their lives.

Along the surface glided the canoes of the Fish-spearers, who stood erect at their prows gazing into the clear waters with a deadly gaze and intensity of purpose. A swift sudden plunge of the spear, and the hapless fish who was basking in the warm sunlight was borne aloft with six barbed prongs through his body, the victim of an incredible Fate. For a moment he gleamed there gasping and squirming in their terrible grip, and the next he was torn by a careless hand from the barbed points and flung with indifference into the boat. His pain was mute; but it must have been shattering in its kind.

In the centre of the Lake the waters are so deep that one can see nothing but the crystal image of the boat.

So we came to the old-time garden on its western shore that is known as The Garden of Lalla Rookh. Its high walls and bastions speak of imperial days, and the lake-folk say it was built by a King's Daughter. One



FISH SPEARING ON THE LAKES

can see at least that it was in its time a very stately and magnificent garden, with its pleasaunce by the water and its stream falling swiftly from the upper terrace. A squatter has possessed himself of it now, and his fruit trees and poplars clothe its ruins and lend them the semblance of life; but it needs the care of the State. It commands the loveliest view of this lovely water, facing as it does the misty snow-crowned valley of the Sind and its immemorial highway into Central Asia.

As we left the seclusion of the Lake there opened before us the marvel of the Pir Pantsal, its tented fields of snow and shining peaks, and its arrowheads of white and blue, which mark Apharwat and the uplands of Gulmarg.

Secluded, profound, and silent; touched by the magic of Imperial times; a vision of loveliness; a haunt of peace; a mirror of mighty peaks and ancient highways, Manasbal deserves all that has been said of it by travellers in its praise.

BOOK II

THE MOUNTAINS

“ Infinitely varied in form and colour, the Kashmir mountains are such as an artist might picture in his dreams.”

Sir Walter Lawrence.



THE LIDAR VALLEY NEAR BLATKOL



THE BIRTH OF A RIVER.

CHAPTER I

FLOATING DOWN THE RIVER

I LEAVE Srinagar in the early dawn, on the first stage of a journey that will carry me into the heart of those mountains that from the first day of my coming into the Valley have called me by their spiritual beauty to a more intimate approach. But for the first day of this new adventure my course still lies amidst the voluptuous scenes and the soft repose of the valley. The wooden bridges, the clustering houses of the city, one by one are left behind us, and the full sunlight of morning finds us in the heart of the country-side through which the river upon which we move, wanders as if Time were naught. It is difficult to convey the sense of silken ease with which this journey is made; for now even the current is with us, and the boat moves without an effort. The towing cord lies idle in loops by the prow; the punting poles are gathered in a row upon the roof, the oars are silent, the crew recline at ease. A lad at the helm alone guides the progress of the boat. The satin river, full from shore to shore, moves without a sound, and through the windless hours there is scarcely a ripple to disturb its harmony.

The landscape is of green fields and pasture lands, meadows and villages and trees. Beyond these there are the silver-crested mountains, misty and half asleep; their splendour veiled and softened in the lustre of the river. Upon the lush pastures cattle graze, and ponies whisk their tails, and the air is filled with the song of the skylark, whose little body, rising with exaltation above the iris-fields, trembles afar in the summer haze. Boats go by, thatched with mouse-like straw and laden with the produce of the valley, and in the midst of such company we arrive at the marriage of the waters at Shadipur, where the lovely Sind runs into the arms of the Jhilam. Their union imparts an air of space and of rejoicing to the scene,

and we tie up here where a little island shrine marks the meeting of the Gods, for the noon-day rest.

Here upon the grassy shore there is a glade of chinar trees, and deep shade, and relief from the glare of the river. One's body, which has accomplished so little, yields itself with a primitive content and relaxation to the joy of the place and its dream-like sentient peace.

Towards the afternoon I take the *shikara* and explore the lower courses, turning aside into meres of blue water, and clusters of reeds, under the uplands which swell here above the general level; and it is thus that I come, with a feeling of enterprise rewarded, upon the remnants of an old Mogul Garden whose long grey wall with its corner towers faces the blueness of the pool. Here in truth is a fit place for a secluded pleasaunce, to which one whose life was engrossed with the intrigues of a court and the bustle of the world could retire for an interval of enjoyment or repose. So well was it chosen that one might pass it by upon many a journey down the river, which is but a short way from the mere's edge, without discovering its existence. Yet, hidden itself, it looks upon a world of far-spread beauty: the shimmer and splendour of the Pir Pantsal, and the valley brooding at its feet.

Grey and old here in the flaming sun, these sad old towers and crumbling walls speak of one who sought after pleasure in a transitory life.

* *
*

Leaving the main river we passed up the Sind in the evening cool into an amphibious land where marsh and river were scarcely to be distinguished from each other; and circling about this, and sometimes losing our way, we found anchor for the night by a grassy shore. The swiftly moving river was about us, and upon its surface the moonbeams played and whirls and eddies raced; symptoms of its secret life and passion. But the scene as I turned to sleep was one of deep calm, culled from some nameless world, upon which no human incident had left its trace. The blue mountains, with here and there a splash of snow, rose mistily above us, but vague and reticent as though they took no part in our lot or being.

I was not however the only new-comer to this recondite world. Beside me on the river's edge was another boat, in which two Englishwomen were travelling, and a little earlier in the evening I had seen them seated by a table on the grass, dining by the light of a lamp. They retired early, with the instinctive caution of women who are alone, and their boat lay silent and dark upon the waters; but long after they had withdrawn to its shelter their men-servants sat on about a fire in the open, talking in subdued voices.

CHAPTER II

MORNING AT GUNDERBAL

My boat was astir in the early dawn, and when I rose and looked out upon the world the scene was changed. The river, grey with molten snow and cold with the memory of its birth, was rushing on its way, the very symbol of prolific life, branching into numberless streams, hastening to unite itself again, curving and sweeping along; vital, multitudinous, one, like a pack of hounds in cry.

About us were golden meadows of buttercups, and the dense thickets of a young plantation, in which willows, poplars, mulberries, walnuts, and chinars were straining after life. It was early in the morning and the full orb of the sun had not yet ascended into the open sky, but great shafts of light were streaming through the passes in the violet hills, and far across the valley, the white snows, remote and unearthly, were flushing pink. A soft mist trembled upon the face of the waters, lifting and vanishing as the sun rose, and the dew-drops lay like silver on the grass. The banks of the river were scarce a foot above its waters, and along them the trackers struggled and fought their way, while the boat, filling the whole width of the river where it swept round from curve to curve, made its slow upward journey.

Once more upon this journey I was impressed with the wonderful variety of this Happy Valley; its gifts of infinity and space, mingled with the most homely and confiding charm; and even as I write we have left the diverging waters, the struggle for place, for a stream wide and placid as the Vetasta itself; for open fields, and cattle by the home-steads, and young lambs skipping on the grass, and the crooning of doves in immemorial trees.

CHAPTER III

GUNDERBAL

At Gunderbal I was content to pass an idle day, preparatory to the journey into the mountains. It is a pleasant spot to do nothing in towards the end of May, for the ice-cold water that flows through it freshens the summer air, and under the heavy shade of the chinars there is shelter from the sun. The river is spanned by a light wooden bridge, and below it there are the ruins of a brick bridge with Mahomedan arches, built in a by-gone day. A lovely camping ground spreads here, with its wide sweep of close turf, its groves of umbrageous trees, and its secret canals and waters, in the coils of which the house-boats lie ensconced. One is here upon the threshold of the mountains, whose great blue walls rise above the river, and at night under the full moon, these mighty forms look frail as the fictions of one's sleep.

As I sat here by the high-way, while my tents were displayed, and the pack-ponies were collected for the morrow's journey, and my servants were busy with their preparations, the world took its customary way, following here some impulse of the soul, there some humbler purpose of life. Under a great tree a Travelling Saint was established, and about him his followers were assembled, in devout attitudes of attention. The Saint with his white beard sat with his back to the tree, and addressed them at intervals in parables and sententious words, and when he ceased from speaking there were murmurs of applause and there was the refrain of low music from some instrument.

"God," he ended, "was one God; and Mahomed was the prophet of God."

Upon the road the Brahmin Pandits, who entertain other views, passed

to a neighbouring village, while their women in gay robes of blue and pink and green coloured the landscape like pictures out of a German Bible. Here was the East with all its simplicity and dramatic appeal.

In the centre of the road, busy over some deep purpose and regardless of the show and vanity of life, there crouched three men, sifting the fine dust, sweeping their hands over the road's surface as a man does when moving in a dark chamber. Patiently they toiled, with tense features and an anxious air that slowly passed from confidence to despair; until at last they sat disconsolate in the cloud of white dust they had raised by their labours, while the world passed on unheeding. At length they rose and approached me, their leader, a giant in proportions, coming forward with hands folded as we fold them in prayer.

"Sir," he said, "we are three boatmen who were paid a day's wage this morning, and passing here by your presence one of us dropped a four-penny piece in that dust, and it has vanished. But we are poor people and this is a great calamity."

"Well," I said, "if you had been more careful it would not have been lost!"

"Huzur," he replied, with tears upon the rims of his great eyes, while his fellows looked the picture of gloom—"it was our fate; it was Kismet. Behold it was the will of God."

It appeared to me that for once I could lift the burden of an unrelenting fate from predestined shoulders; so I said,

"Well, here is four pence; go in peace,"

and they took it with many salutations and went off mightily relieved; yet reflecting it may be that had they been born under a happier star they would have had the sense to make it eight pence.

It was while returning from this good deed done in a naughty world, that I slipped on the gang-way of my boat and fell into the ice-cold water. I remember feeling, as the water gave under my confiding feet, a sense of the abiding treachery of life.

CHAPTER IV

FIRST MARCH

I ROSE at five with many good intentions; but in the East no one hurries, and the sun was well up before my caravan was afoot. Our track lay up the Sind Valley, passing at first through villages, embowered in the shade of the old walnut trees and chinars, watered by running streams taken from the main river, and made beautiful by the wild rose. But the village folk were afflicted with goitre and dreadful to look at. By the way-side I came upon a party of Baltis, fresh from their bleak uplands, with their yaks and ponies, engaged in feeding greedily off the piles of half-ripe mulberries they had shaken from the trees. Here already was a people different from the Kashmiri of the Vale, and as I looked upon them and their felt-coats, their goat-hair girdles, their travel-worn air, the diversity and charm of way-faring suddenly came upon me.

Further, where a bridge crossed the river and great boulders brought down a side valley made a shelving fan of chaos, there were the remnants of some old city, the carved pediments of a temple. And soon I was in the midst of a Bakarwal camp by the way-side, in which the whole tribe was gathered together, from the new-born babe to the aged and infirm Patriarch, in the midst of goats and sheep, and jars of milk, and unleavened bread upon the platter. Upon the road marched the multitudinous herd of the tribe. The vast convoy of sheep and goats and dogs and shepherds moved as one, yet with an infinite diversity; the herdsmen whistling through their fingers, calling, gesticulating, pelting the wandering goats with stones, and whipping up the lagging; the dogs running to and fro, and the sheep keeping humbly to the road, while the goats, with their silken hair swaying, moved with an independence and character that were almost human. Some

knelt by the water's edge to drink, others rose upon their legs to reach the mulberry-shoots, and even climbed twenty feet up into the trees. They nibbled at the wild briars and the shrubs, investigated all that lay upon their path with an insatiate curiosity, rushed at the blackened stones of cooking places and licked them with avidity; and withal moved in the distance like a wave dappled with light and shade, at a pace that rapidly consumed the miles. The sires of the flock, with their great curved noses and tasselled hair, bore a striking resemblance to the patriarchs of the tribe; and in the milch goats, with their slender forms and swaying fluttering motion, there was an affinity that was irresistible, with the Bakarwal women. It was a singular community that was thus upon its travels; and it was thus that Abraham marched when he came with his flocks out of Ur in the Chaldees.

Beside these wanderers, here one hour and gone the next, were the people of the soil, ploughing and planting their rice-fields with the infinite patience and hope of the long-settled peasant. A little way off sat a group of travellers from the fastnesses of Dras and Baltistan, mongoloid of feature, shy and unobtrusive, as strangers in a strange land. Through all these diverse peoples ran the unifying bond of the white high road, the electric wire, the steel Suspension bridge of the British engineers; and thus were the centuries commingled; the nomad pursuing his immemorial mode of life, unmoved by the stability of his neighbours. But the wild rose was here before the first footfall of man was heard; and she seemed to me, as I rode, the most perfect thing in the valley.

* *
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My noon-day halt is called by a way-side spring, over which a Calender, I am told, built his home some fifty years since, and ministered to the spiritual needs of the traveller. But the Saint has joined his forefathers, and the roof of his house has long since fallen in. Yet the spring lives on, and those who are afoot stay here to partake of its bounty, and of the shade of the walnut trees it waters. A little brook flows away from it, and beside it there shimmers a nursery of young rice, of a green that is more vivid than any other in Nature.



THE SINDH VALLEY.

As I repose here the wind ruffling its surface fills it with indescribable joys, dragon-flies glitter and flit across it with startling speed, a pair of doves descend in its midst, and a Hoopoe trails his pied wings over its brilliant surface. The little brook in its meanderings divides me from a party of Baltis who like myself have come here to pass the noon and eat a way-side meal. I see them come slowly up the dappled road and make for this spot, and in a twinkling the yaks and ponies are at grass, the pack-saddles unloaded, the travellers at ease; one lighting a fire, another filling a pot with water from the spring, while the rest of the company spread their limbs with undisguised relief. Presently they eat and talk and slumber under the walnut shade, while the brook runs on, and the scene with all its humble charm, is such as this valley must have known for a thousand years. All about us are the blue and ever-green mountains, some deeply-wooded and others spangled with snow; the willows by the water silver in the wind, and the air is laden with the murmur of the Sind, as it foams and rushes in the distance on its way.

I confess that when I left the silken ease of the valley and the comfort of my boat it was not without a touch of reluctance, and for a mile or two as I came along the stony road I regretted all that I had left; but now, as I sit here and pass the noon till it is time to move again, the old joy of wayfaring steals upon me, and I am glad to be of a world in which men march and halt, and take their rest by the wayside, till it is time to march again.

The Wanderer

"Round us everywhere the leaves fall
You can hear the winds gaily call
For them to fly—
And the birds are lured from the nest.
Wanderer, for you there will be rest,
To-morrow you will die."

Abd-Rebbehi.

CHAPTER V

KANGAN

I MOVED on in the afternoon to Kangan, crossing a bridge over the foaming Kankanai which comes straight down here from the heights of Haramukh veined with silver and noble of outline, far above this lateral valley. The breeze as I stood here in the hot sunlight was cold and fresh from its passage over the snow-fed stream.

At Kangan my tents were pitched in a walnut grove, beside a village embosomed amidst fine trees, and vivid with the rice nurseries, in which the women, and here and there an old patriarch, were at work. The sky was misty, and the beauty of the mountains was dimmed, till at sunset the light came with a sudden gleam upon the peaks of the valley, and they shone like silver before the night overtook them.

I rose at five to find a man, sick unto death, lying prostrate in the shelter of the *serai* near my tent. He had been there, my near neighbour, all night, and I had not known it. He lay almost naked, moaning, and unconscious of the world, but still at issue with Death. His eyes were closed. His uncovered state, his abject condition; these were nothing to him. Yet his vital forces still struggled with the terrible shadow that encompassed him. His tense fingers, his deep breathing at long intervals, told of the awful conflict.

But one could see that Death must win. His son, a Balti lad of sixteen, stood beside him, afflicted with grief, but mute. Now and then only he shook his head, or leaned forward to cover the dying man's face. Eight days, he said, his father had lain here; he would eat no bread, and there was nothing he could do for him. He was poor; he had no money. . . .

I could see that the people of this wayfaring place: the sergeant,

the shop-keeper, the post-man, paid no heed. They were evidently callous; a traveller, a Balti, what was he to them? His hour had come. He must die. Others of his race were encamped under a walnut tree a little way off, their fires lighted, busy about their food. The dying man was placed under the charity of an official roof at the mercy of the world. The village next door was indifferent. If men travel they must be willing to die away from home. Such is the sentiment of those who stay with their own. Even in England, where they would have carried him to hospital and tried to save his life, the feeling would have been the same. There would have been some pity, but little understanding of the stranger from foreign parts who had come away from his own home. Yet in truth does it matter where a man dies? This man, fighting his last fight, was concerned with nothing but its issue; unconscious of those who looked upon his agony.

Upon the road the sun was shining, and day was abroad. Lofty pinnacles of snow rose into the summer haze, and woods of dark cedar climbed the higher slopes. Lower down in the valley there were walnut trees, with waters sparkling and running over at their feet. The world took its way. Here was a shepherd carrying a young lamb, its legs in his hands, its body about his neck, as in the Bible pictures. Upon the road a trader from Ladakh was returning home with his veiled wife; a man of substance with a following of pack animals, and ponies for himself and the lady of his choice to ride upon, harnessed with brave trappings and scarlet saddle cloths that took the eye. The lady, hidden within the white flowing folds of her Burqua, was an object of mystery and potential beauty. She might have been a prize from the shores of Bayukderé or the Golden Horn. But Mahamdoo, the man who carries my baggage and beguiles the way with his knowledge (for he is a great traveller and feels like choking, he says, after he has been confined at home for a month) relates her history.

"Behind that veil, Sir! there is naught but the face of a Ladakhi girl, a round face with small eyes. I know, because I saw her coming down the valley with Yaqub, when he descended with his felts to Srinagar. She was then unveiled, and a person of no importance, like the rest of her people. But at Srinagar she learnt about Burquas; and behold! she returns to Leh a veiled personage"—



A BEAUTY OF THE VALLEY

He spoke as one who scorns a recent patent of nobility; but the lady shut up within her cage was doubtless filled with aristocratic emotion.

By the way-side I met another group of the wandering herdsmen, and I could not fail to be impressed with the handsome air of the men, the erect and flowing shapes of the women, and the gypsy beauty in their eyes. One of these was perhaps the prettiest woman I saw in Kashmir. As I approached the encampment I could see her running towards me down the road, but unaware of my approach. And there she sat with tears about her lashes, a picture of beauty in distress, while the older and plainer women of the tribe gathered about her and scoffed at her misfortunes. What was her story ? Was she rebellious about the husband selected for her ? or was she too proud, for their taste, of her manifest and excelling beauty ? I could not enquire, yet was I curious to know.

The men of the tribe told me they came to the foot hills of Jammu some forty years ago, from the North-West, and they reckoned themselves of kin with the Pathan of whose language they spoke a dialect. They migrate here each summer to escape the heat and fever of the low country, and find pasturage for their flocks. The lands they hold they leave to others to cultivate for them for a share of the harvest. They are a sort of wandering aristocracy in their way, with their ancestral herds and fine patriarchal air.

"The region which Kailasa lights up with his dazzling snow, and which the tossing Ganga clothes with a soft garment."

Kalhana.

CHAPTER VI

THE BEAUTY OF THE SIND VALLEY

The next day the Sind Valley realised expectations. I had been told much of its beauty; but this beauty is of a minor order till one nears the high gorges that usher in the charms of Sonamarg.

I rose while the Moon still shone in the west, and the snows beneath her were bright under her gleam. I saw her pale, and the earliest rays of sunlight glow with a brighter fire upon those snows, and then I saw the day break over the valley as I took the road. But there were deep violet shadows still under the right bank and the cold was sharp and keen.

My camping-place for the night had been on a grassy slope that fell gently to the river, and a clear mountain stream ran beside my tent, the roots of a walnut tree that sheltered it reaching bare and gnarled to its rushing waters. The green grass about me was marked with the weals of a hundred previous encampments, the scene was one of beauty and life; yet I perceived in the clearer light of day that it was the burying place of many generations of men upon which I had encamped; and in the shelter of the lilac-flowered scrub I came even upon a new-made grave. It is thus in the East, where life and death go strangely together, hand in hand.

The night had been grey and over-laden; but in the morning the valley seemed re-born, and as I walked in the shadows a beautiful picture lay at my feet, the river curving like a bow under the cliffs, pale green and foam white, while beyond it there spread a level vale patterned with heavy trees, whose shadows in the early light lay like velvet upon the meadows and the fields. Here had nature or man, in their dim out-reachings, fashioned something that was near of kin to an English park. Yet above this park

there rose to soaring heights, and snow-starred summits, the dark fir-woods and climbing walls of the valley.

At Koolan I crossed the river, at a point whence a track leads over the mountains, past ice-floed lakes and under the glacial fields of Kolahoi to the Lidar Valley. Here the tributary waters came falling in joyous beauty, past mills and homesteads, and flocks of sheep that grazed in peace upon the edge of the thundering river.

Near Gaggangir these minor yet exquisite incidents reached a sudden climax of might and power, where a cataract of snow, laden with drift and scented with the resin of the shattered firs, spread like a lava-flow across the Valley. I could trace its beginning high up on the gleaming face of the mountain, its swift descent and overwhelming flood as it breasted the river and rose to the opposite steep. My path lay across this tumult of frozen snow and drift, whose consuming might impressed me, though I could see that the hour of its dissolution was already at hand.

Everywhere from beneath the snow, which a few months before had held the valley in fee, streams of water were bursting through, great caves in the sheeted ice were dripping under the stress of sunlight, and mid-way, the river, fiercely triumphant, was rolling with an irresistible momentum, between the walls of ice and ice-like snow, through which it had cloven its path. From these walls, cut as with the stroke of a sword, there projected the trunks of trees and withered boughs and fragments of stone, while their face was a dappled sea-green, and brown, and marked like the skin of a leopard. I knew as I stood there with the roar of the river in my ears, its green waves dashing and foaming at my feet, that I stood in the presence of passion and life.

We think of Nature, with our customary arrogance, as of something inanimate, yet here was she surprised in the very transports of emotion. I felt like one who looks upon the closing scene of a great battle, upon the shattered remnants of the defeated army in flight, upon the exultant pursuit of the victor. And such it was. For with the passing of Summer the Snow had come and had conquered the valley, burying the green woodlands, shattering the great trees, engulfing the very river itself. But now with Spring and the returning Sun its power was broken, and the Spirit

of Life with her conquering banners and music of rushing waters was once more abroad. The Cuckoo knew it, for she was calling from the deep thickets, and the sheep knew it as they came by in their thousands, bleating, filling the air with their cries of rejoicing, the rams and the young lambs and the uddered ewes, on their way to the upland pastures. Here they swarmed over the drift-wood and the brown ice, and with them there came the shepherds and their women and their young daughters, and as the herd moved their children ran laughing amongst them, seizing the ewes, while with swift skilful fingers they drew the milk into their wooden bowls.

At Minimoy the scenery of the valley began to absorb all my attention, for at each step it seemed to increase in sublimity and variety of beauty. On the left bank the mountains rose up like the very pinnacles of Heaven to a dark blue sky, across whose void, gigantic clouds, white and luminous in the sunlight, sailed upon their aerial course. The peaks shone like sword blades, and were uplifted with a majesty of architecture that dazzled the imagination, so far did they surpass any human conception. From their high altitudes the snow drifts fell with an almost perpendicular descent many thousands of feet to the brink of the green foaming river. My path lay upon the right bank, facing these wonders, and as we crossed the face of a snow-slide one of my ponies slipped and wavered, and my tent was carried upon the instant like an avalanche into the furious river.[1]

My next impression was of a gorge opening out into an amphitheatre, where soft meadows lay grey and green like the necks of wood-pigeons, and flowers bloomed, and glaciers came falling in cataracts from a snowy world upon a valley that smiled in serene security at their feet. This was Sonamarg.

[1] "It was at this point which Mirza Haidar calls the 'narrow defile of Làr,' that the Kashmir chiefs vainly attempted to stop the brave Turks of the invader's advance guard; and Kalhana's Chronicle shows that this defile had witnessed fighting already at an earlier period."—RAJA-TARANGINI.

CHAPTER VII

SONAMARG

My tent having vanished into the roaring Sind, I sought the shelter of the Caravan Serai, and was thus in the midst of a varied company of travelling men and beasts. It was not a Swiss hotel, and dirt was plentiful. Yet I reflected that I was better off than in Andorra; and the weather being uncertain, I had the luxury of a floor and a roof over head. As the rain came down, strange visitors drifted in through the Serai gate, furtively, as if seeking shelter, yet doubtful whether it would be safe to enter: men from Dras and Ladakh, in long grey woollen coats and felt boots, with seamed and weather-wrinkled faces; pack-ponies and flocks of long-haired goats. One by one they all defiled into this democratic shelter. The goats sniffed and wandered into the inner rooms, whence they were evicted with loud cries and the beating of sticks; the men made fires upon the earthen floors, striking their lights from flint and steel, the evening meal was cooked, and long pipes were filled and passed from hand to hand. At one end of this primitive place there was a room reserved for travellers of a somewhat better class, a rough and uninviting chamber; yet so soon does one get used to one's surroundings and make them a part of one's self, that when I woke in the morning to find the sun shining in, my bed looking warm and comfortable, and my possessions spread about me, I felt as if the place were my own, and I was almost reluctant to leave it. I had slept well; I had been warmer than in a tent, and I repaid its hospitality by passing a delicious hour in it, long after the sun had risen and the world was afoot.

About nine I went forth into the splendour of the morning, to find cattle pasturing by a stream that was starred with ranunculi, deep woodlands, and grey Alpine summits glittering with snow under a sunlit sky.

It was the first of June.

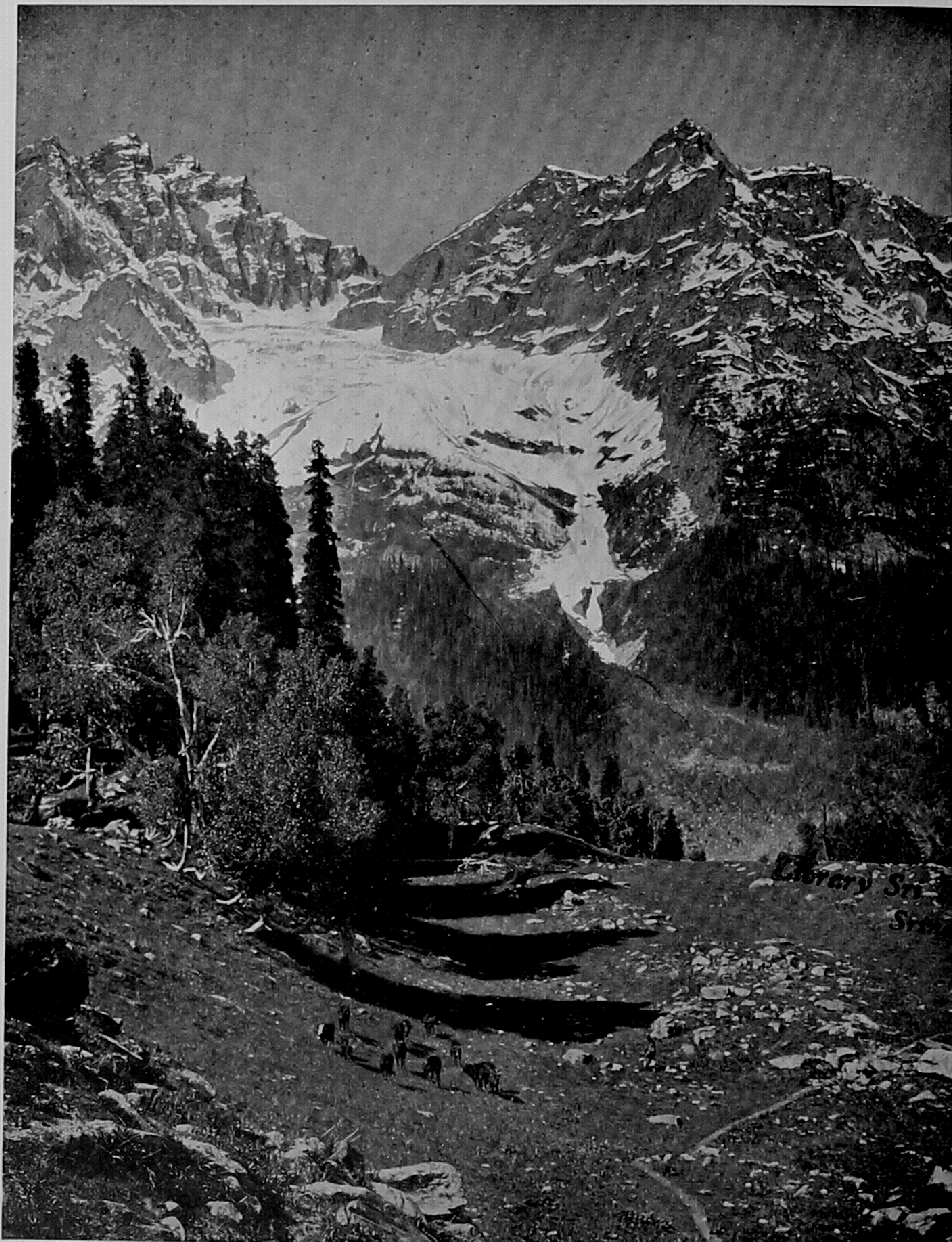
Here also were horses whisking their tails, and sheep taking cover from the pouring sun; and peasants ploughing up the rich dark soil, calling to their cattle in loud admonishing tones.

Picture the black cattle straining at the yoke, their muscles a-quiver in the light, the ploughman pressing them forward, the green meadows, the mighty mountains, the dark blue sky with navies of white clouds full sail across it, the vivid sunlight. Listen to the cuckoo calling from the woods, the sudden song of the skylark, the bleating of lambs, the lowing of the milch cattle on the pasture lands, the music of the river on its way to sea. Add to these a strip of white road like a child's ribbon, a road of immemorial days along which life has moved for unnumbered centuries, from India into Central Asia, from Central Asia back to India; upon it men and cattle and horses—and you have the scene before you.

Happily for me I was not content even with these sights, but passed on till I turned the shoulder of the dark wooded hills which define the left bank of the Sind, and so came with a startling transition into the presence of the mighty peaks and rolling glaciers which are the wonder of Thajwaz. I had already observed their loftiest pinnacles and sharply descending streams of snow on my way up the valley the previous day; but I was now to find myself unexpectedly in their midst. For it is here at Thajwaz that a tributary water of the Sind enters the greater river, and it is fed by the glaciers that pour their frozen masses down the eastern face of these mountains. I followed the little river up its lustrous valley, and in its short course of a mile or two found it environed by a beauty that is, I suppose, unsurpassed in the world. Here in the midst of dark sentinel firs, and silver birches clothed in the infantile green of spring, the stream bursts from its snowy matrix, and falls in green cascades over rocks and fallen trees. One sees it thus at the moment of its birth.

It is a wild valley, the haunt of Nature unadorned: yet, whether by design or chance, its waters where they fall smoothly over the prostrate trees, are the image of those at the Shalimar.

Higher up the brief valley, the clustering birch trees make a pattern against the snow, and beyond them the steep walls that shut it off from



THE GLACIERS OF THAJWAZ.

the outer world rise in great masses and stainless fields of snow. Here upon either side of the river are sharply contrasted the northern and southern slopes of the mountains; the one ice-bound, glittering in all the panoplies of winter; the other green with dark fir-trees, and grassy meads, and enamelled with spring flowers that blow upon the very edge of the ice. The sky is of the deepest blue, and the whole valley is filled with light; brilliant, shining, wonderful light. In this medium the great cliff summits, grey and silver, rise like the fabrics of a dream; and far upon their lofty pinnacles, upheld in the empyrean like an oblation to the gods, are folds of the whitest softest snow. One wonders how so far up, under the very eye of the Sun, they retain their frail existence.

Between these summits lie the glaciers, frozen and motionless, yet like things, alive; for they present the very image of action in their mighty descending folds and curves and involute masses.

Perhaps one of the loveliest things in this valley of loveliness is a pool of crystal water, in whose gem-like depths every pebble is depicted. It lives its own life fed by secret springs from the mountains, hard by the foaming rushing river; tranquil as sleep, untouched by any influence other than the passing breeze. Here I am under the impression the Goddesses of the valley bathe before the sun is risen, in the incomparable stillness of the dawn.

At Thajwaz I passed the day; while the eagles soared over the valley, sweeping across it with majestic wing; while the waters murmured on their way, and curious pine-martins came loping over the stones, their black and yellow velvet rich against the silver landscape; while the flowers bloomed by the snow's edge, and herds of black buffaloes looked out at me from under the fringe of the shadowy woods, and the cuckoo's music announced that summer was coming in. Hard by me under the dark shelter of a stone a great moth, in the robe of an Emperor, was laying her golden eggs, fulfilling her debt to life.

But for these creatures I was alone; the only occupant of the valley.

These deep solitudes, these hanging woods, with the wind whispering through them like the hidden voice of the world; these superb mountains

raised up against the portals of Heaven; how different they were to the lovely sensuous valley I had left behind me, its silken waters and gardens of amours, and its people moving to and fro in boats. There, was life, humanity, ease; here, was Nature, beautiful and dangerous. What wonder that my man when he came up to join me, fell in his humble way into a fear of the place? These glacial peaks and foaming waters which to me appeared so wonderful, to him were horrible ugly. He would be glad he said to see the last of them, and be back safe in his own home.

As if to add to his terrors, and confirm the horrific character in which he regarded this lovely valley, a storm blew up over the mountains; the grey peaks and glaciers were veiled in lowering mists, a roar of thunder bellowed through the gorges, and rain fell.

But in due course the sun stole out again with a welcome glow, and I took my way back to the shelter of the Serai and the hamlet of Sonamarg. My path lay through the deep woods which fringe the meadows, and I walked upon the soft surface of last year's dead maple leaves, upon a carpet of a million violets, across rivulets that raced and scattered and mingled with the joy of their release from the grip of winter, while their edges were embroidered with creamy ranunculi. As I emerged from the woods the scene before me was bathed in the mild effulgence of evening, and I sat for a while in the glow and warmth of the fading sunlight to enjoy it.

It was the close of day, and all Nature seemed conscious of the wondrous event. The plough cattle released from their toil were slowly drifting homewards, the blue smoke was rising from the fires of a nomad camp, the murmuring river was lit here and there with shafts of light, and the dove-grey masses of Nilnai were luminous, with deep shadows to add to its great beauty. Far above me in a world of their own the swallows were flying against the grey sky, and the last message of the setting sun was borne from cliff to cliff, from velvet green slopes to grey Sierras, to the ultimate white encampments of the snows, unblemished in their loveliness and far above the world.

Opposite me a little mountain-river came foaming down to join the Sind, and at their junction lay the hamlet of Sonamarg, a cluster of frail wooden huts. High above it a waterfall was visible, but unheard. From

the upland meadows the sheep of the hamlet were slowly descending to their pens, and one by one I could see them, as they passed in at the narrow ways under the shepherd's eye. Here and there a light shone through the low-browed doors of the houses, in whose rooms, half underground, the simple folk with their wives and dark-eyed children live closely packed for nearly half the year, while the world is white and snow-shrouded about them.

And Night had already fallen and the stars were shining in the dusk, when down the road came the mail-runners from Ladakh, hastening on by the rushing Sind towards the dark and difficult defile which constrains its waters to Gaggangir. These men, and the soft humming of the wires in the night's stillness, spoke to me of a far-flung Empire, and of the links that bind this secluded hamlet to the majestic world.

"Allah is One Alone!
Look on the Universe and find the proof;
Within the House of Life are many rooms,
Above them all the one o'er-sheltering Roof."

Diwan of Inayat Khan.

CHAPTER VIII

BALTAL

I LEFT Sonamarg as the sun was rising, and rode along and up the valley in the early light, rejoicing with the river in the freedom and beauty of the morning. In a deep shadow-laden gorge on the right bank I found a recent settlement of Baltis, and in the humble fields, one, a tired-looking old man, was at work piling up stones to make a wall. His labour was the labour of one beaten in the conflict of life, and was childish and ephemeral in its character. These are people who have been broken on the wheel, and in their gait and bearing they suggest centuries of inferiority to stronger men, and subjection to an inclement Nature.

It were hard to find a more striking contrast than that between the squalor of this hamlet and the beauty of its site. Its inhabitants have been here now for seven years, having left their homes in the bleak uplands of Baltistan for want of land, and they have in that time raised up a number of children and a mass of filth. They have also built some primitive houses of stone and wood, and are slowly tilling the fields, which owing to the long winter, yield but one uncertain crop of millet in the year. But the deep woods, the stream falling in cascades through the sheltered valley, the dove-grey beauty of Nilnai, whose organ-like pinnacles and white gleaming spaces rise above the hamlet up to Heaven, would make the fortunes of a host of people in another land.

While I was still occupied with the old man building his feeble wall, there passed me on the road a person of quite another mould. A white beard flowed upon his breast to his girdle, and a green turban rose above his clear-cut features. He had the grand air of a person of spiritual as well as of material consequence; and he might have stepped out here from

amidst the pillars of Solomon's temple, with the Urim and Thummim on his breast.

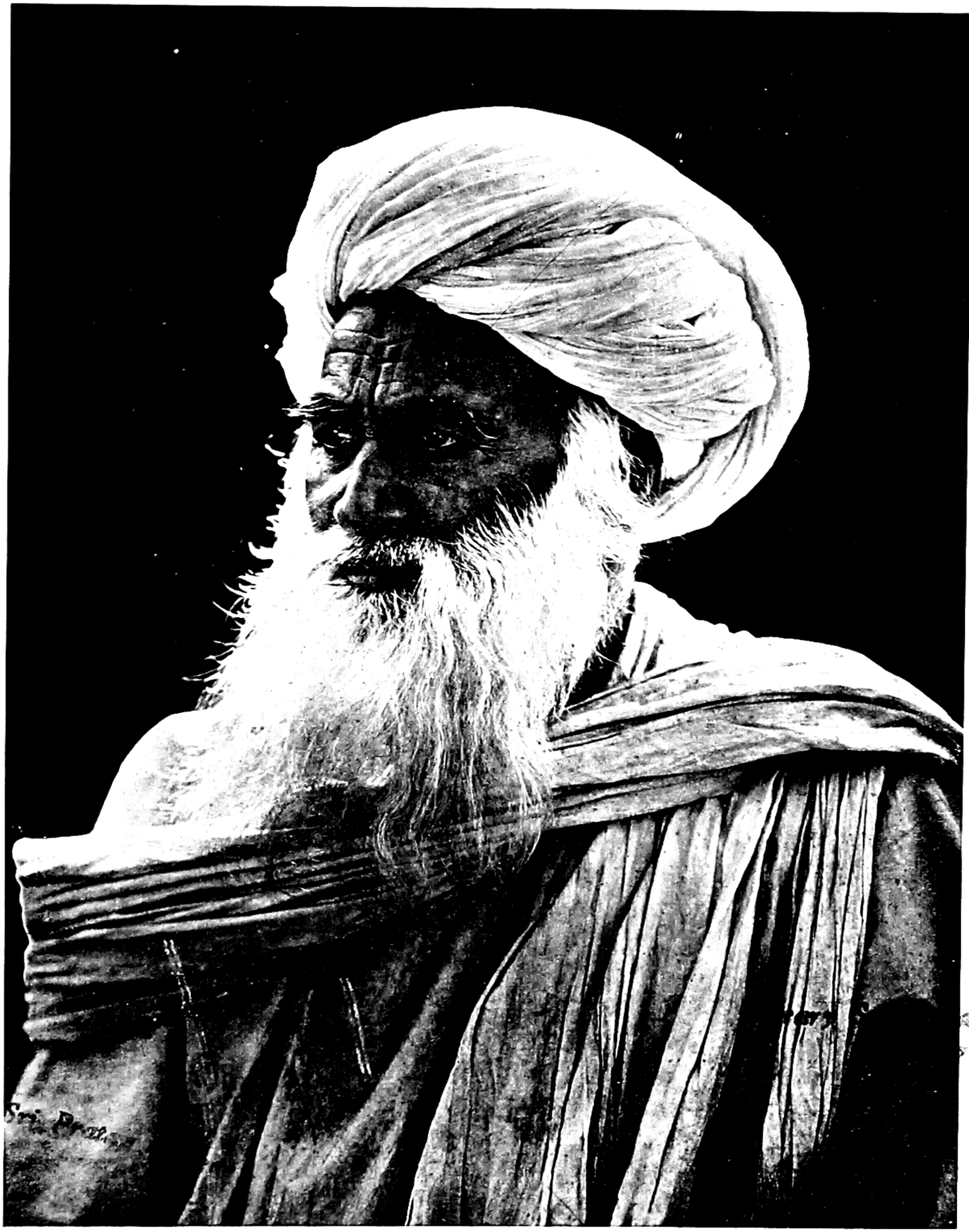
"A Haji from Mecca," whispered Mahamdoo, "and returning to his home in Yarkand."

He gave me a brief nod of salutation, as from one who is busy about his own affairs, and as he passed a lark in a cage twittered before him for his consolation. Behind him there followed humbly three ponies laden with varieties, the fruits of his wonderful pilgrimage; amongst them an illuminated copy of the Koran.

Here, indeed, I reflected, was prosperity, the rounded fulness of a life. For what can be more fitting when your worldly affairs have prospered, than to go when you are old but yet vigorous, across the buzzing world to the shrine of the prophet of Heaven; there to pray,—where one prayer avails as much as an hundred thousand in your own home,—and so to return, assured of Paradise hereafter and of the respect of your friends in the evening of your life. We have nothing to equal it; for though we can raise a man to the Peerage, and cover his breast with stars, we know not how to furnish him with a title in the world to come.

The valley-road lay smooth before me, devoid of stirring incident. Yet as I went, the river hastening by snowy shores, the flocks of sheep upon the velvet hills, the flowers by the way-side, made soothing company. Fresh snow lay upon the nearer summits, brown and silver; while at intervals, the turning of the road or the lifting of a cloud yielded an entrancing view of some Dolomite peak or sword-like pinnacle of ice. For a few moments also in the early mist of the morning I saw that rare phenomenon, the sun in the centre of a great circle, with images of himself at each pole. As I approached Baltal the mountains stood up in a great encompassing circle, and the valley came visibly to an end at the foot of the Zogi-la.

Here in this great company a sky-lark rose from the earth, and carried her song into the sun-mist, and taught me the unity of life. For she moved and felt and sang in this lone valley where the snow lies heavy for half the year, and man has scarcely left an impress, even as she might have done over an English acre. And when I spoke to the old caretaker



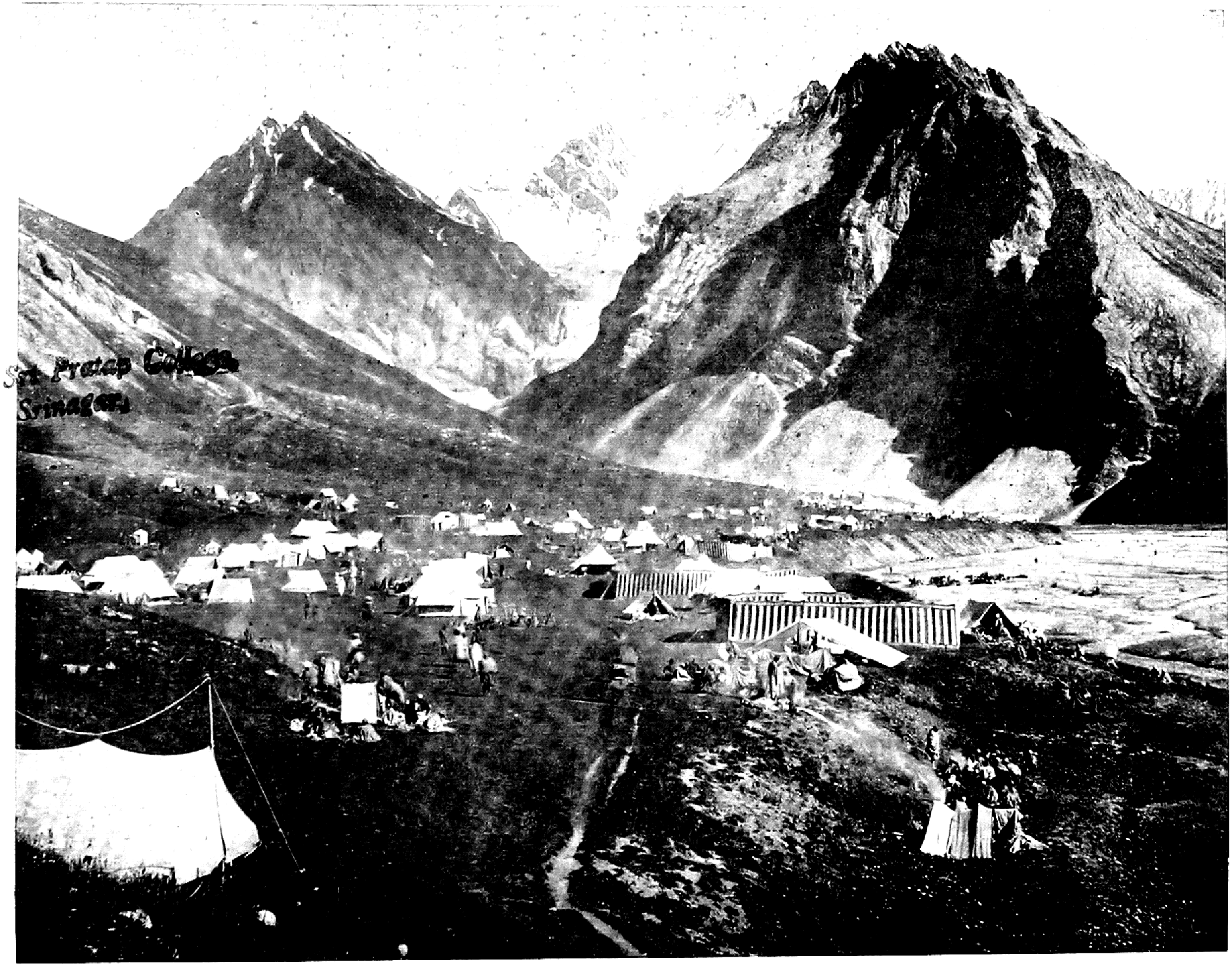
THE HAJI.

of the house at Baltal, who shares with her the solitude of the valley, I learnt that he was one whose words and mind exactly fitted my own, so that in the space of half an hour I learnt all he had to tell me of his lone winters here, and of the solitude that overtakes him, so that he has to resort for human fellowship to the post-runners as they hasten on their way over the Zogi-la. He is content to live here alone for a payment of six shillings a month, and for what he can get as he says from "the English *sahibs* and the *Missies* and the *Mems*" who come in summer to look at this far corner of the world.

He had much to tell me also of the game in the neighbourhood, and of the care to be taken in travelling over snow with a river swirling into life below. The Maple woods by the house were thronged with a herd of buffaloes that had arrived over night, the first herd of the year; and the previous day he said the first Bakarwal had crossed the Dachinpara with a flock of five hundred goats. "For lo!" he said, "the days of snow are passing and the Sun is once more King."

"He went up and up into the mountain till he came to the mouth of a lonely cave at the foot of a mighty cliff. Above the cliff the snow-wreaths hung, dripping and cracking in the sun; but at its foot around the cave's mouth grew all fair flowers and herbs, as if in a garden, ranged in order. Then Aeson whispered, Fear not, but go in, and whomsoever you shall find lay your hands upon his knees and say, 'In the name of Zeus, the father of Gods and men, I am your guest from this day forth.'"

The Argonauts.



THE PILGRIM CAMP OF THE MAHARAJA.

CHAPTER IX

AMAR NATH

AMAR NATH is the most sacred place in Kashmir, the abode of the God Shiva who lives here incarnate in an icicle, and it is visited by pilgrims from the farthest shores of India. What Mecca is to the Moslem Haji, Amar Nath is in its way to the good Hindu. For months each year it is buried in snow and ice, and it is only in August that the road to it lies open to the ascending pilgrims, who come to it in a great multitude, led by the Maharajah of Kashmir himself. Many die by the wayside, happy in the fulfilment of their purpose.

"Its scenery," wrote one, an Englishman who visited it, "is wild, grand, and more imposing than anything I have seen in Kashmir. I shall never forget it. One felt there in the presence of the Maker of the Universe."

The approach to it lies, in summer, up the Lidar valley; but in winter and spring, while the sacred waters of the Amravati lie buried under masses of snow, one may ascend to it with an effort from Baltal. The early days of June are late for the enterprise, for the waters are already breaking through, and once they have done so this narrow gorge becomes impassable. I could not tell whether I should find it open, for when I set out on my journey no human footstep had passed before me for a year.

I started early, for there were some twenty miles to accomplish before dusk, as well as a climb of many thousand feet. The night had been wet, but the dawn was flawless, and the waning moon rode high in the blue lane of sky above us as we left Baltal.

There was light to travel by, and the birds in the valley had begun to sing; but we had gone a quarter of a mile, before, looking keenly about me, I caught the first gleams of sunlight on the loftiest peaks.

It is a commonplace perhaps, this swing of the world that carries one fraction of it from darkness into light at the dawn of a new day; yet to one who travels and is thrown upon his thoughts and reflections it comes each time with something of a sense of wonder, as of a miracle that is wrought for the first time. The majestic words of Lucretius insensibly revert to one's mind—

> "Principio caeli clarum purumque colorem,
> quaeque in se cohibit, palantia sidera passim,
> lunamque et solis praeclara luce nitorem;
> omnia quae nunc si primum mortalibus essent,
> ex improviso si nunc obiecta repente,
> quid magis his rebus poterat mirabile dici?"

How beautiful, silent, and pervasive is the advance of light at this exquisite hour, and how one's body responds to it with the instinctive memory of ages quite as much as one's tutored mind!

We took our way for a mile or so, through birch woods and meadows wet with dew, to where the Amravati, along whose frozen course we were to travel to Amar Nath, runs into the Dachinpara river. All up to this was gladsome and joyous, with the music of birds and the coming of sunlight on snowy heights; but the gorge of the Amravati met us, sombre and dark and silent, its snow soiled with the blackness of the long winter and the shattered drift.

Up this dark side-valley we took our way in silence, overwhelmed by the sombre horror and deathly stillness that lay upon it. No ray of sunlight had yet reached it; no voice of bird or creature was heard. We had passed as it were into the corridor of an infernal world. Slowly we climbed over the sullied snow, unconscious of the life that moved beneath it; slowly we plodded over the dark hummocks, the shattered trunks of dead trees. Here a man slipped, there a man paused with labouring breath. It was a sullen and hard beginning to a memorable day.

At last the voice of a cuckoo broke with a sudden music upon this strange valley in which nothing had life, and its advent seemed to change the scene as if by magic. I turned to look about me, and there beyond the dark canyon up which we had come, shone the marvellous lustre of day breaking upon the distant cliffs we had left behind us. The sight must

have gladdened any one, so bright was it with hope, so brilliant by contrast with the dark shadows in which we were engulfed. The cuckoo bore us company far up on our way, until the ascending path took us up into regions where even its music was stilled.

But now the stir and murmur of the river were about us. Here and there it had burst through the superincumbent masses of snow with an incredible *élan*, and the roar of its passage filled the valley so that we could scarcely hear each other speak. And then again the river was imprisoned, and its music was stilled, and there was a deadly silence, and we marched step by step up the hills of frozen snow; until in the distance a faint murmur arose, like the vague murmur of a distant city, and grew and grew like the sound of an army approaching, until once more we stood upon the brink of the foaming waters, and saw the river raging with a frenzy of action under the dead counterpoise and heavy burden of snow.

Our journey was in the main one of toilsome ascent and descent over billows of frozen snow, and therefore called for little more than endurance; but there were occasional passages fraught with some little risk to a party like ours, unequipped for mountaineering, and these lent an added zest to our travels. For where the river had burst a gap in its snow incubus, there our path narrowed from the whole width of the valley to bare foothold. The very circumstance that had forced an opening in the snow made for a dangerous passage, for it was at these points that streams or avalanches of snow coming into lateral contact with the river had caused a violent impact, under stress of which the snow cover had given way.

There were two or three such places of which I retain a recollection. At one, the first we encountered, a snow-slide ending abruptly in a wall of ice, under which the river plunged, made progress on the left bank impossible. On the right an avalanche of loose shale had torn away the whole face of a mountain to a height of five hundred feet. Far above us we could see the lowest trees hanging by their roots upon the verge of dissolution; and along the whole surface of the shale, a tumult of rocks and stones retained its foothold as it were by a miracle. But these also were doomed to continue their journey to the river, and indeed we had barely

passed along this treacherous surface when a mass of rock rushed down the slope and closed the narrow path behind us.

At another the sharp descent of the right bank made any attempt along it impossible; but on the left a snow-slide offered a precipitous passage. Here there was no path, for no one had gone before us. Twenty feet below our footsteps the river plunged in an access of fury, flinging its spray up into our faces and its mist into the air with a deafening roar.

At one point also where there was neither sound nor murmur of moving water, the dead mass of snow under our feet was riven across the valley, and through this narrow and deep crevasse we could faintly discern the green glint of the silent water sweeping along its course. It lay there, beneath a thousand tons of snow; and at places this intolerable burden was piled up above it to a height of a hundred and twenty feet. It was here that we moved with the utmost confidence, for the floor beneath us would have sustained an army.

Of life we saw little; but as the day advanced, birds sang, and upon the snow there were inscribed the recent hoof-prints of the ibex, the musk-deer, and the barasingh, the great stag of Kashmir. Once we heard the shrill cry of the marmot, and saw these curious little creatures peering at us and darting into their holes. Once, also, I saw a bird—a little black bird with a snowy head—tripping happily across the foaming water, heedless of its wrath. And every now and then there was carried to our ears, like the sound of a mystery, the distant explosion of an avalanche upon its way.

We had reached within a mile of the Sangam or sacred union of the Amravati and the Panjtarni, when our eyes were gladdened with a view of almost heavenly beauty. At our feet, as we emerged from the darkness upon the crest of a great snow billow and looked upon this sudden vision, lay a tranquil reach of open water of a turquoise hue, but clear as ice, while from its surface rose miniature bergs in strange life-like forms. Sheer walls of frozen snow stood up about its banks, of the colour and texture of sun-warmed marble, and cut as if with a knife. Below the great snow roof upon which we stood the river glided without a sound.

It was lovely enough, yet the glory and wonder of the scene lay in the vision ahead of us of the five-pointed peak of Panjtarni, a dazzling citadel

of snow, faceted like a jewel, and brilliant as a God. Beside it rose another double-pointed peak of almost equal grandeur and beauty. I had not in my life seen anything more beautiful, or anything which more perfectly depicted in these mountain fastnesses the scenes of an Arctic world. It was a symphony of the purest colours, turquoise by the river, white, dazzling, and blue-shadowed as a diamond, where the peaks rose up into a heaven of incomparable blue.

In this scene there was no trace of conflict, nothing that spoke of passion. Its character was of that which is flawless in its perfection, of that which is eternal and beyond vicissitude. I think that if a man opened his eyes from sleep or some long oblivion upon this spectacle, he might well imagine himself to have been carried up to heaven, or at the least to have been offered a glimpse of Paradise. I conclude that it was this vision, and not that curious emblem in the cave at Amar Nath, which first led some transcendental Aryan mind to interpret this as the abode of God.

This for me was the real climax of the journey, but its customary purpose being to attain the cave itself, I continued on my way. We presently arrived at the Sangam, or meeting of the waters. Above their junction, in the midst of an amphitheatre of snow-covered mountains, there is a grassy knoll enlivened with the most vivid flowers, upon which I reposed, and in vain endeavoured to induce my followers to accompany me to Pahlgam; for before me spread the radiant vision I had first seen in its most perfect manifestation some moments earlier, and it beckoned me with a fascination I could not resist; but they would see me no farther on that road. They had come, they said, from Sonamarg, they were ill-equipped for so arduous an undertaking, and they begged to be excused. So we turned up the narrow gorge of the Amravati, and the sun bore down upon us with a fierce heat, which made this the hardest part of our journey. The increasing altitude also told upon every member of the party.

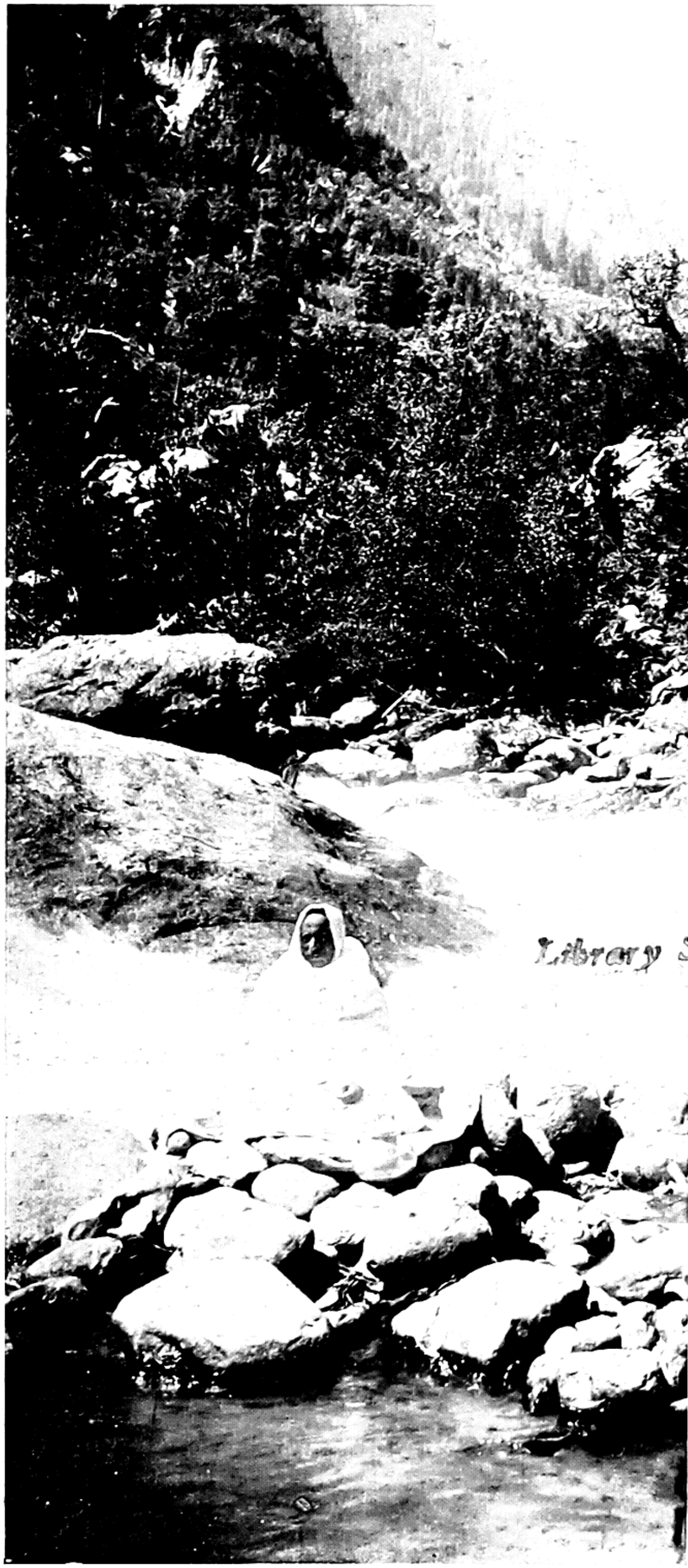
The cave was now clearly visible on the right bank of the river, with several thousand feet of snowy roof and gleaming pinnacle above it. Opposite it rose a precipitous wall crowned with snow, and straight before us shone with a radiant beauty the snow-fields which marked the culmination of the valley.

Flowers blossomed at the mouth of the cave, and swallows flew from its shadow into the blinding sun. No pigeon flew out upon us, to mark as it sometimes does for the pilgrims The Living God; but his emblem shone like silver within the recesses of the cave. Its character was unmistakeable and a little curious. To an unbelieving eye it was no more than a fountain or jet of water, which owing to the altitude and the cold within the cave—for the sun's rays do not reach these innermost recesses—appears an icicle. Yet to the Hindu, ever seeking in his worship after the Life-force of the Universe, it is the very symbol of the Creator.

Here to this block of ice, to the recesses of this cave, devout pilgrims, from the Princes of the land to the humblest of the lowly, from accomplished scholars to those who have no letters, come in their thousands, braving all the toils and the dangers of long journeys across the Indian Continent, to bestow their garlands and offer up their prayers. Here it may be is but an idle superstition, yet the impulse which sends them out of their ordinary lives into the midst of these splendours of ice and snow, where the hand of a great Architect is visible in the fulness of his power, cannot fail to illumine their hearts and lift up their souls.

At the time of my visit the world here was white with snow and unmarked by any human footprint; but about the mouth of the cave there still lay the shoes of the departed pilgrims, and here and there the faded petals of their last year's garlands.

Descending from the cave, we passed once more along the valleys, resting our eyes upon all the beauties we had marked upon our upward way; but the sun no longer shone in a clear heaven above us, clouds gathered in mighty forms, and this journey that had begun in the moonlight and the brightening dawn closed in to all the thunders of the firmament. The rain-clouds and the white mists came rushing down the gorge from the summits of the peaks, like an army that would punish and destroy. We made good our exit, however, before the swirl and the darkness of rain had completely enveloped the narrow defile of the Amravati; and as we reached the edge of the Sind and its wider outlook, my eyes were charmed by the sight of a great herd of goats that had come through that morning from Dachinpara. There were hundreds of them assembled under the birch-



THE MAHARAJA AS A PILGRIM.



THE WANING LIGHT

trees and upon the grassy slopes, and in the midst of them stood the Bakrwals, with their blankets wrapped about them and their staves in their hands. These men are amongst the earliest visitants to the mountains, their flocks pass over the high passes when the rivers are yet frozen and the grip of winter is scarcely yet relaxed, and these we looked upon were the first comers of the year.

A few minutes later, I was enjoying the delights of warmth and comfort in my room within the Rest House while the thunder roared and the rain plashed without. There is no greater pleasure in life for the tranquil mind.

CHAPTER X

THE ZOGI-LA

THE Zogi-la—a pass 11,300 feet above sea-level and twenty miles in length—is the link between Kashmir and the uplands of Baltistan. The traveller to Central Asia regards it but as the beginning of his long and arduous way-faring, but he who is returning, as the lintel of an earthly Paradise. It soars high above Baltal, and one climbs to it as to a fifth-floor window to see what there is of the world beyond. The modern road climbs continuously to the summit of the pass, and it repays one's labours by the striking contrasts it offers by its daring and by the beauty of its outlook. As one ascends, the view looking back, develops, till with a rise of a few hundred feet there are disclosed all the features of Baltal and the meeting of the waters under its promontory. One can see the Sind making its way through green meadows and under the mighty hills to its exquisite passage at Sonamarg, and one can see its union with the little river that has come to meet it from the Zogi-la. This the people call the Bhot-Sind.

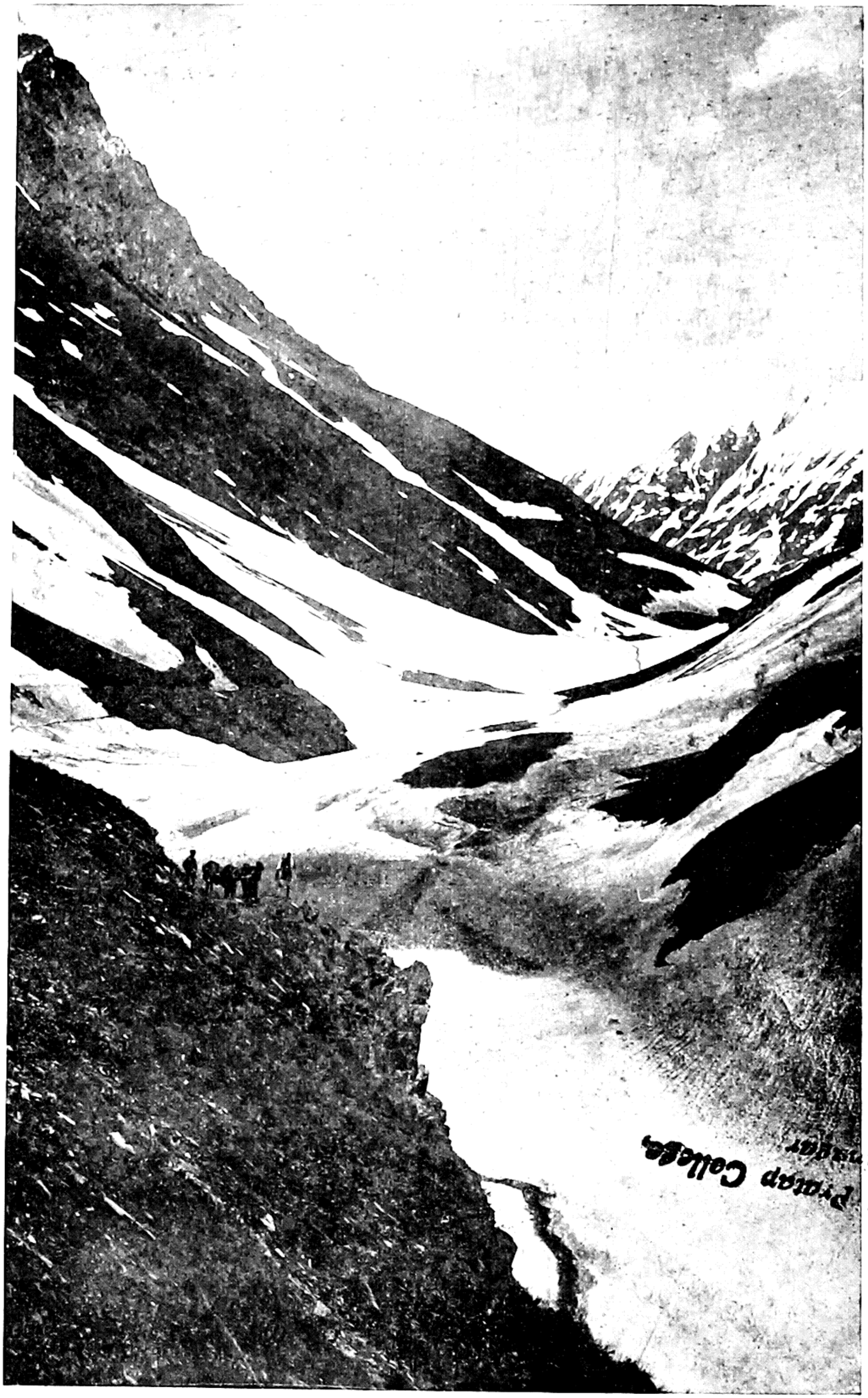
But when one has climbed a thousand feet one's eyes rest with delight upon the Upper vale towards Dachinpara, which is almost at right angles to the course it has followed as far as Baltal. Here is a scene that owes nothing to man. No road enters it, and there is no habitation within its compass. Yet it might be a little Italian Valley, so ordered and perfect is its beauty, so soft and peaceful is its character, here at the foot of the snow-laden mountains. Through it winds the blue-green river, and upon its southern edge, where the sharp cliffs and mighty walls of the mountains give way to easy meadows—the very site for an Alpine hamlet—there are dark erect Fir trees, as slim and brooding as Cypresses; some alone, as though their shadows were meant to fall upon the sward of a country villa,

others in clusters and groups with interspaces of green lawn. There are masses too of heavy-foliaged maples and silver-barked Birch trees. The prevailing colour of the valley is dark blue and green, with its turquoise ribbon of river running through it; and light and shadow, as the white-puffed clouds move across its vaults of sea-blue sky, lend it—what otherwise it might seem to lack—the sentiment of life. Far above these beauties of colour, one's eyes travel to the dark Sierras and the incomparable whiteness of the snow-fields that lie in the glacial valleys of that up-lifted world.

One sees this picture, it may be, from a vantage-point on the road, where a young birch in her silver bark and light green foliage, stands dreaming of her own slim loveliness upon the edge of a profound abyss, down which it is not well to look too long.

And here is the first of the striking contrasts that awaits one on this bit of road, some three miles in length, that carries the traveller to the summit of the Pass. For, while the Valley smiles in its peaceful beauty, the Road marches along the most dangerous precipices. In places it is carved out of the solid rock, in others it is built up with walls which overhang the deeps, and at some points at this season it does not exist at all. At these a great avalanche of snow descends, almost vertically, the entire face of the mountain from peak to river. Across this white slide a track is cut about ten inches in width, along which the yaks and ponies from Ladakh and Baltistan make their way. If you stop when you are half way across this exiguous thoroughfare to survey the scene, you perceive that you are clinging to a wall of snow some four thousand feet from top to bottom, and that should you exceed your narrow foot-hold, you would find no resting-place other than the river some thousand feet below you. Such a place as this is terrifying to the imagination, but in practice it is safe enough, as the long lines of laden yaks and ponies testify. One's foot-hold may be narrow, but one stands upon a high-way of the world.

More impressive than the avalanche is the span of the telegraph wire. Far above one, clear against the sky-line on a rocky summit, stands the tall mast from which it makes its flight; and thence in one mighty curve it sweeps across the abysmal depths of the valley to some far invisible point beyond it. I tried to follow its course, but even had my eyes permitted



THE ZOGI-LA PASS

this, I think that I must have abandoned my purpose, so over-powering was the impression it gave me of a headlong fall. The wire seemed a thing alive.

I turned from it with relief to the sweet beauty of the Birch trees beside me, and the strange people who frequent this road. One party of them consisted of five men in long woollen coats, with seamed and wrinkled faces; of five ponies laden with dried apricots; a pair of yaks which looked the very image of melancholy as they came shambling down the road; a donkey, and a sheep with a lamb that was travel-stained and weary with its hard way-faring. I passed many such parties, some preceded by a yak, whose furtive gloomy head came stealing round the corner of rock, like a phantom from Hades; others by a Ladakhi who upon seeing me came to a dead stop, threw up his hands, and then hastened to occupy the safest corner of the road, while calling in a loud voice to those who were coming after him. I sometimes wonder if I made the same impression upon his bleared vision, as he made upon me!

Presently I reached the climax of the ascent; the road became more level, and I travelled far enough upon it, to look into a snow-laden valley across which minute black creatures were moving at a pace that was less than funereal, and there was scarcely a tree in sight. So might Dante have pictured the transit of the dead to another world.

Yet how beautiful also was this valley 11,000 feet above the sea, with its snow-white encompassing mountains, upon which the sun was shining with the brilliance of a June day, while the white clouds sailed with a serene grace across the blue sky!

I knew, as I stood here, that I was looking upon one of those passages that divide one land from another; one of those highways upon which history is made. Through this gut in the mountains I knew that men had marched from time immemorial, one a Conqueror, another a Saint, another a Traveller who would see the world; and besides these, the great army of those who must live, who would sell that which they have for that which another has to offer in exchange. It was here I reflected that some four hundred years ago there rode upon a great adventure a near kinsman of the Emperor Babar. He had with him an escort of four hundred and fifty cavalry, and

his purpose, in which he succeeded, was to win Kashmir for the Mogul Empire. It was after him that there came from the opulent south, to mingle their names for ever with the fame of Kashmir, the great Akbar, the indulgent Jahangir, the magnificent Shah Jahan, the lovely Nur Mahal, and all the galaxy of splendid men and women of the most splendid court the world has known.

Here my journey came to an end. Before me lay that which for me at least was forbidden. Behind me lay Kashmir and the lovely valley I had left but a half-hour since. And at my feet lay the Zogi-la water, silent, and buried under masses of soiled and discoloured snow.



NANGA PARBAT: ACROSS THE VALLEY

CHAPTER XI

TOWARDS HARAMUKH

Returning down the Sind, I left the valley at Kangan for a visit to Haramukh and the lakes that lie about it, frozen for the greater part of each year. Here as at Amar Nath is one of the sacred places of the Hindu world; and up these toilsome ways the pilgrims come, carrying the bones of their dead to their last resting-place in the waters of Gungabal. The summit of the great mountain is declared to be the favourite abode of Shiva, inviolable by human feet. Below it, in the gorge of the Kankanai, is the shrine of Bhutesvara, whose classic ruins date back to a time when Christ had not yet been proclaimed in the world.

My first march was a short one from Kangan to a little place that bore the name of Panzin. Of late, the luxury of a long morning under the flap of my tent, the comfort of a warm bed, had led me into evening marches; but here I returned to the only right hour for the traveller.

For the world is fresh at this hour, the flowers so happy for the night's repose, and the cool dews of the morning. And this is the time to see sights; for all good travellers march at dawn. And then there is the long day of enjoyment before one, the leisure of noon and light slumber under the trees, the knowledge that for many hours of rest and physical satisfaction, to which all yield, there need be no further claim upon one's energy.

My camp was pitched in a grove of four chinar trees whose resplendent boughs yielded a mighty shade. All through the hours and into the shadows of evening they sheltered me completely from the sun. The colonies of chaffering rooks and hooded crows which frequent these trees, stole in and out of the hollows in their trunks; and as I lay there at their feet and looked up through their green-gold foliage past the silken-grey of their

boughs to the tracery of blue sky far above me, I passed for a season from all other preoccupations into this other world.

Yet about me the quiet scenes and normal incidents of the country-side might well have engrossed my attention. In and out making delicious curves amidst the trees was a little stream, whose purpose in life it is to water the village acres, and at this season they drink deep of its bounty; for the young rice—green as an emerald—needs all that the stream can give it. Wherever the waters meandered there were Pollard Willows, and at intervals miniature glades and grassy spaces where the young cattle found pasture. There was thus a touch of infancy about this corner. In the glade nearest to me, the calves and the little black kids browsed in the care of the village children, and at noon I found them all dozing together in a group under a Mulberry tree, which had taken up its abode here in the company of the willows.

There were hills and mountains too, some of them veined and splashed with snow; but they seemed afar off in the summer haze and made no claim upon my attention. Yet upon one I traced the outlines of a Marg,* which might appeal by its seclusion and loveliness to one who had work to accomplish, or merely a desire to be alone. It was uplifted upon the summit of a hill that was difficult of access, and I presently learnt from Mahamdoo that it was known as Mohan Marg.

The name is familiar to every one who has read Kailhana's Chronicle of the Kings of Kas'mir, in the version of Sir Aurel Stein. For it was here upon this upland meadow, over the space of a dozen years, that he accomplished his translation of the Raja-Tarangini with a romantic thoroughness. When you think of that strikingly interesting record of events in Kashmir, from the days when Asoka lived and Alexander's fame and influence were still bright in Northern India, of its tales of those who fought for the possession of this jewelled valley, and of those who "full of ambition set out from it for the conquest of the world," of the pride of the craftsman that fills it as of one conscious, like the old Roman poet, that Immortality is for him alone to bestow; and then turn as I did by the way-side chance of a tra-

* "The Margs are beautiful stretches of turf which ringed round with great Forests lie at an elevation of from 7000 to 9000 feet above the sea."

veller passing the sultry noon, to that lonely meadow high up in the hills, where a quiet scholar with the same pride in his craft, laboured upon this old Sanskrit record and presented it with such perfection of attainment to the European world, you cannot help knowing that there is romance in such things as well as in Love and Adventure and in the stirring things of Life.

For "*We pay reverence*," so runs the chronicle "*to that naturally sublime craft of poets without whose favour even mighty kings are not remembered, though the earth, encircled by the oceans, was sheltered under the shadow of their arms as in the shade of forest trees.*

"*Without thee, O brother composer of true poetry, this world does not even in its dreams know of the existence of those Ornaments of the Earth who once rested their feet on the temples of elephants, who possessed wealth, and in whose palaces maidens dwelt, moons of the day.*

"*Without thee the Universe is blind.*"

But the man who was content to spend so many summers in the seclusion of this upland Marg, whence, as he writes, almost the whole of Kashmir lay before him "from the ice-capped peaks of the Northern Range to the long snowy line of the Pir Pantsal," became something more than a scholar, and it may be that the restraint and the outlook helped to carry him on to those greater adventures which have since placed him amongst the men of action of our time.

By a singular coincidence, this chance halting-place under the chinars of Panzin, brought me also across the foot-prints of another man whose name is engraved upon the history of Kashmir. For as the evening grew the Village Headman came and sat by the brook, and conversed about his fields.

"Sir," he said, "since Laren we have had great peace. He came walking along this very road on his way to Wangat, and I stood before him, thus, with folded hands, and said:

"'Huzoor, here is great *zulm*; yon field is mine, but another from the next village, who has friends at court, has stolen it from me';

"and Laren said, 'What is your name?', and I said Sobhana the son of Futto, and he put it down in his note book; and then he said,

" 'What is the name of your field ?'

" and I laughed and said, 'Huzoor, they call my field Bamjoo,'

" And he put that also in his book, but said no more and took his way; and lo! in the fullness of days when the Settlement was accomplished, my field was given back to me, and Justice was done."

" And who was Laren ? " I enquired—

" Laren," he replied, " was the great Sahib who made the Settlement; the friend of all Zemindars. Since his time a deep confidence has settled upon our hearts. It was he who said 'O Wise Ones do not part with your lands for they will one day become gold.' "

Some of the other farmers of the neighbourhood had by now quietly joined our party. When the Headman had finished his tale, they echoed it with evident sincerity.

" It is true," they said, " Laren was our great benefactor and our children's children will remember his name."

" Sir," they added with the grace of humility, " we know well that we have many faults. We perceive that the evil of untruth is in our hearts; and in the past our sins and our shortcomings have brought upon us heavy misfortunes; but we rely upon the clemency of God. What is written is written."

The Kashmiri is much abused as an altogether vile and worthless fellow, and he has been treated in the past by his hard task-masters as of less account than a dog. But here were gratitude and admission of sin, and that abiding faith in the compassion and mercy of God which is written so deeply upon the Moslem mind.

Night fell, balmy and warm after the sharp cold of Baltal, and I sat in the open under the sky, speculating upon the careers of these two men, who have won fame beyond all other white men in Kashmir, and wondering which of them would survive the longer. The written thing remains; yet is the verbal memory of the East a wonderful thing, and the name of Lawrence, who gave the unfortunate Kashmiri peasant his rights, is written imperishably upon their hearts.

It was a starry night, and the great Northern Stars shone directly over my lamp. Upon the hill-sides gleamed like fire-flies the encampments of

the herdsmen moving to the upland pastures, and even in the darkness of night were visible the mountains, darker than the sky, while the far snow-touched Dolomites were a pale sapphire scarcely distinguishable from the firmament overhead. The cicadas beat their drums across the rice-fields, the night wind murmured in the branches of the chinar trees above me ("planted by some Wali or Badshah of by-gone days")—the little brook more vocal than in the day purled in musical cadences before the door of my tent.

" Ancient tradition ascribes the sources of the Sindh River to the Ganga Lake at the foot of the Glacier of Haramukh; and the waters of the Sindh are traditionally identified with those of the Ganges ; hence it is that the Pilgrims ascend to the frozen waters and throw into them the bones of their dead."

Sir Aurel Stein.

CHAPTER XII

THE TEMPLES OF VANGAT

For two or three miles beyond Panzin my way lay through the village lanes, amidst walnut trees and willows and hazels, with a great forest of pine and spruce rising high above it on the mountain slopes. This was no high-road, but a little by-way of the people, rough and uneven, a natural part of the hill-side. The wild briar and the white jasmine scented it, and pink roses, yellow jasmines, and wild honey-suckle, with the lilac tints of some common brushwood, lent it colour. Every now and then it crossed a brook which came babbling over moss-green boulders the very image of unfettered life, while by its side there ran an olive-hued canal, secret and silent, the tutored servant of man.

Presently the path crossed over to the other side of the valley of the Kankanai by a rough bridge made by the villagers, and there became part of the ancient track that has been followed for upwards of two thousand years by the pilgrims of Haramukh. But time has not softened its asperities. It is possible indeed that the pilgrim likes an arduous path. The sun glared on it, and there were no deep woods to yield it shade.

So, ever ascending the valley above the white foaming river, we passed through Vangat the last Kashmiri hamlet, where the Bakarwals with their slim pretty women on horseback were collected about the village fountain in the course of their own way-faring.

Beyond this point there spreads a wilderness of dark woods and mountains, the haunt of migratory shepherds and herdsmen, and of a few half-nomad Gujars whose mighty buffaloes crowd the foot-way, while here and there a field of Indian corn planted by them, marks the beginning of their recent settlements. Here in the shelter of the pines I found a flock

of two thousand sheep in the care of the *chaupans* or professional shepherds, while their anxious owners who had ridden up on ponies from the distant vale, with salt for their sheep and rice for the shepherds, hovered about on the outskirts. About their new fields the Gujars were assembled with staves, ready to inflict punishment upon trespassers from the flock, and of these foreign men the Kashmiri Chaupans were visibly afraid.

In the midst of these patriarchal scenes as of a world that was yet barely emerging from its pastoral state, I came as if by a miracle upon the classic walls and time-softened harmonies of one of the ancient temples of Kashmir. The passing of many centuries and the cruel fanaticism of a people who with each change of religion strove to destroy all traces of their own storied past, had wrought their will upon the temple and its courts, its enclosing walls and secret altars. The Gujars were extending their fields into its innermost precincts ; and within the sanctuary I found a group of Bakarwals passing the noon-tide, cooking a meal. The domed roof of the temple was black and scorched with the flames of many such bivouacs, and the Gujars who in their turn hate and fear the Bakarwals, complained that they insisted, in violation of the orders of the State, in treating it as a way-side sarai.

Every trace of carving and relief, every outline of a God, had vanished from the temple. Its walls were shaken and disjointed, its roof was bare of the carved stone that once graced it, and young trees and shrubs were sprouting from its interstices.

Yet how beautiful it still looked with its half Doric grace, and classic purity of line, in the midst of all these symptoms of decay ; and how its grey-blue stones still dominated as with the intellect of man, the forests and the mountains and the valleys !

Hard by it in a grove of pines that soughed and whispered in the wind, my camp was pitched within sound of the hastening river, and within sight of blue-green glades and vistas of fir trees, and mountain tops still splashed with snow.

This temple is the loftiest of the group which in by-gone days made their appeal to the reverent pilgrim, seeking amongst these wilds to penetrate the Mystery of God. Below it upon a lower level there spreads a



SHEEP IN THE ANCIENT TEMPLES.

wide extent of buildings now involved in hopeless decay. The roofs of these lower temples have fallen in, and of other buildings little but the mighty bases of pillars and columns remains.

One of these suggests an open Forum or pillared Hall. The colossal character of the stone-work is evident in the blocks of granite which lie scattered about, and at one place there is a water-trough some fifteen feet long and half as broad, which is cut from a single stone. The surface of the granite on the temple walls where the rain drips and water lodges is worn like the soft stone of an Oxford College, and crumbles to the touch. Scarcely a trace of ornament survives; but here and there upon a stone, built in by later hands into the court-yard wall, there is the design of the sacred goose and scroll, which in almost an exact counterpart I have seen upon the walls of Manuha's palace at Pagan three thousand miles from Kashmir.

The precincts of the temple are bright with the pale yellow bloom of a species of elder, whose faint perfume pervades the air, while the pink wild-rose droops in her beauty over the shattered domes; destroyer and beautifier in one.

Beside these lower buildings and across the strip of road upon which the wandering herdsmen pass with their multitudinous flocks, there is the spring of pure water, the Naran-Nag, which first gave this place its being. Its waters are collected in a wide four-square pool of cut and fashioned stone, and they are of that pellucid and exquisite tint which belongs only to such pools in the mountain arcana of India. Part of the pool's surplus flows down to the grassy valley and so to the white foaming river; part emerges soundless from under the massive walls, and flows on beneath the altars and foundations of the temples.

Who can doubt that it was this natural fountain, itself the home of a God, which first appealed to the builders of the temples? The place is stamped with antiquity, and breathes the sentiment of classic times. Its beauty appeals to all, and the wonders of the massive architecture make a profound impression upon the minds of the wandering herdsmen.

"Were these Men, Sir, or Gods, who built these wonderful monuments?" more than one of them has enquired of me.

But we know very well that they were men, for the chronicle of Kailhana, less perishable than granite, bears record of their origin, and of the Kings and Princes who visited them in their prime. From it we learn that the Greeks having been driven from the land by the Emperor Jalauka, Asoka's son, erected the first of these stone temples by the sacred pool and the waters of the Kankanai. His successors lavished upon the spot their liberality and their devotion. Thus the king Lalitaditya, "returning from the conquest of the world," presented it with a fabulous sum as an expiatory offering for having left his favoured Kashmir for the lands of the impure barbarians, and built here a lofty temple of stone. And here a more terrible event occurred by the edge of the sacred pool in the days of Avantivarman the King. For when he came to worship at the shrine of Shiva he saw that the temple-priests had placed upon the altar of the God, the base offering of a wild herb of bitter taste. When he turned, indignant, upon them to ask the reason for this offence, they threw themselves on the ground and spoke with hands folded.

"*In the Lahara district, O King, there lives a powerful Damara, Dhanva by name, who is attached to your minister Sura, and treated by him like a son.*

"*This Damara whose power is unrestrained, has taken away the villages that belong to the shrine, and it is thus that we can offer to Bhūtesa only this oblation.*"

The king left in the midst of the ritual as though he had not heard what he had heard, but his Minister the crafty Sura was quick to perceive the gravity of the matter. Hastening to the temple of Bhairava, which still survives half buried in the earth beside the pool, he sent messenger after messenger to bring up his favourite Dhanva, and

"*When that fierce Damara came at last before Sura, he made the earth shake with the tramp of his host of foot-soldiers, and did not bend his back.*

"*As soon as he had entered, armed men, at the order of Sura, cut off his head while he was yet alive, in front of the image of Bhairava.*

"*The wise Sura, who had thus removed the king's displeasure, then went out after having the body from which the blood was pouring forth, thrown into the tank close by*"—

The king then rose from his couch and completed his worship.

Perhaps the most beautiful hour in which to look upon these relics of a by-gone day,—amidst which for so many centuries men fought and slew each other, now with the keen edge of the sword, now with the subtler blade of the tongue; amidst which they dreamt and meditated and worshipped, seeking their Unknown God—is at evening when a great peace falls upon the valley, and the last rays of sunlight still linger on the distant mountains, bathing their green and purple in harmonies of pale gold, and lifting their snow-touched summits, like altars up to the threshold of Heaven. The place is then wrapped in a sort of benediction, as though the souls of all these erring creatures had been finally taken to rest.

"Whose head in wintry grandeur towers
And whitens with eternal sleet
While summer in a vale of flowers
Is sleeping rosy at his feet."

Lalla Rookh.



HIGH SOLITUDES.

CHAPTER XIII

TRONKHAL BY HARAMUKH

I LEFT Naran-nag for the long climb to Tronkhal by Haramukh at an early hour, scarce after four. The valley of the Kankanai lay wrapped in sleep, yet lightsome with the first faint traces of the coming dawn. Road there was none, but there was the mountain-side abrupt and precipitous, up which the pilgrims climb with the patient ardour and zeal of those in pursuit of an ideal.

It is a hard road; yet it offers an ever-widening view of the Vangat valley, of the ruins which still grace it, and of the high world of shining peaks and ice-laden gorges, that expand before the pilgrim as he draws up to a level that consorts with their majesty. Here the serrated Dolomites look down upon the snowy sources of the valley, here is the Matterhorn-like peak of Kolahoi with its glaciers beyond the far valley of the Sind, here in mighty array are the snowy peaks and glaciers and sierras which people this upland world. Yet again as he climbs, the view spreads far across the vale of Kashmir to the white emblems and standards of the Pir Pantsal. And then, a turn of the road, and this passing vision is concealed behind the shoulder of the grass-clad mountain up which it climbs, and the view looking down upon the Kankanai and its tributaries is one of intense colour, the deepest blues and greens and violets, such as are never seen in the outer Himalaya. Far down in this mist of peacock loveliness, the stream foams white as silver, its roar coming up to the summits only as the vague and distant murmur of some great city.

But there is neither city nor hamlet in this deep valley. It is the abode of solitude, and the haunt of the great eagles, whose gliding pinions lend it its only symptom of life.

Upon the upland meadows along which the track wanders, there are ponies at grass and mares with their whinnying foals, and soon now there will be flocks of white sheep by the thousand, established here for the hot summer that follows close upon the heels of winter. Already the snow has nearly gone, lying here and there only in drifts, and in its place there are fields of flowers of the brightest hues ; Primulas of violet, pink, and rose ; Anemones, white and violet black ; Gentians and other coloured beauties, while in their midst the butterflies flit more lovely than the flowers. Soon there will be here the blue Himalayan Poppy that blooms only at these great altitudes.

And then one turns the corner, and there is the visible majesty of Haramukh, grey and snow-white and austere, with his blue gleaming glaciers falling in tumult towards Gungabal. Here at his feet, the world is stern and worn with the stress of Winter. The snow still lies upon the higher Downs, and from these, vast cataracts of stone descend with no touch of earth to lend them grace. Yet the listening ear may hear beneath their chaos the murmur of water hastening on its way to the forests and the meadows and the sea. Here amidst sentinel firs and twisted birch trees, in the company of birds and flowers and upon the lush teeming grass, we make our camp under a sky of stainless blue, while far above the summit of Haramukh, the great eagles and the vultures wing their leisured and lordly flight.

* *
*

Towards evening the scene is changed. A storm blows up, the sky becomes dark with a great army of flying clouds, and the thunder roars like a battle about the majesty of Haramukh. Snow falls upon all the adjacent mountains, and Haramukh withdraws behind a veil of snow and mist. An old Roman here would have heard in the tumult the angry voice of the God, invaded in the privacy of his innermost retreats ; and it is indeed in this light that the pilgrims who toil up here from the thoroughfares of distant cities, regard the superb and invincible mountain. None to this day believe that his summit is approachable by human feet.

Alone in the company of the great mountain and of the dark over-shadowing woods, one can enter with sympathy into such beliefs; and there must be times in mid-winter when no human voice is heard in these precincts, and the great Peak is the nexus of terrible storms, when they must acquire a terrific reality.

But at this season of early summer one is not long alone even here. Over the sky-line this forenoon, as I looked for my struggling coolies and baggage, there came a small horde of Bakarwals, with their flocks and their ponies, their tents, their women, and their children, and presently established themselves in the woods below me. I was glad to see them arrive; but when, as is customary, I sent my man over to their camp for some goat's milk, they gave him harsh words and sent him back discomfited.

"The milk we have here to-day," they said with loud exclamations, "we require for ourselves and our women and our children, and if the Maharajah himself sent for some we should refuse to let him have it; go to, and tell this to your Sahib."

In such circumstances a personal interview is desirable, so I went out into the rain to the Bakarwal camp. Their fires were lit, some tents were already up, and the men gathered about me under the dripping firs, while the large-eyed women looked on, and the children wedged themselves in wherever there was space.

"I have come to you," I said, "for a cup of milk."

"Sir," they said, "it is impossible; the great herd has gone on a day's march, and all there is we keep for ourselves—we can give you none."

"Nevertheless," I replied, "I claim a cup of it." They looked at me with a frank interest. It was clear that someone must give way. They looked at one another; their eyes wandered to my encampment, to the grey sky above, to the falling rain. They gave way.

"Go, Sir," said the spokesman of the tribe, "return to your tent; stand here no longer in the rain; and when our goats come in you shall have the milk you desire. *Is not all that we have yours?*"

A few minutes later the light before my tent door was darkened by a rough figure, who might have been Abraham himself with his flowing robes

and blankets of sheep's wool, and in his two hands there was a foaming bowl of two quarts of milk.

Thereupon he sat before me and conversed for an hour, telling me of his homestead in Rampur, and his love for the free wandering life on the mountains, the zest of changes of scene and water.

"Only one thing is there that we fear, Sir," he said, "and that is your Law"; and he spoke with a grave earnestness, as one who felt himself up against a mysterious and invisible force.

"Do not think, Sir," he went on, "that we are wild people, careless of comfort. We carry tents and sleep upon warm blankets. Our lives are precious to us. And we are not alone—like you. We carry our wives and children with us, even the 'Nikka-shukas,' the little ones. This is our Home," and he swept a glance at the blue smoke and the tents of his people under the trees.

He would take no payment, and he moved off with the air of a freeman, who had been a guest. When he had gone some way, the cook called after him to return and take payment; but he waved him off.

"Thy Master," he said, "is a Sahib, and for the milk I have offered him from my heart, I take no price. See to it, O cook! that thou dost not enter it in thy account, and so cheat him and dishonour me."

The night fell darkly, and long after the stars had issued I could see the fires of the Bakarwal encampment, and hear the faint cries of their children. Nearer about me my own followers were gathered about a fire of great blazing logs, warming their hands, happy after the day's toil, and heedless of the cold and rain.

How can one be ungrateful to any of these people, who do so much for one, and are so willing to follow where they are led? I know how much they are abused, but for my part let it be said here that I like these people, and would willingly forget their faults.



THE BAKRWAL

CHAPTER XIV

NUND KOL

THIS was a great day for me, the memory of which must long survive in my recollection. As I left my camp at Tronkhal, I found a party of Gujars with their wives, children, ponies, and a herd of slate-hued buffaloes assembled on a hillock, to which they had come over night from the Vangat Valley. Crowded here together under the birch trees, the snow lying all about them and Haramukh resplendent beyond, they looked the very type of the nomad, seeking each day a new home. A stream flowing through great boulders lay across my path. From the green hill beyond it I took a last view of my camp below in the midst of the dark-pointing fir trees, of the Bakarwals moving slowly across the scene, and of the mighty world beyond, blue and snow-white, pinnacle after pinnacle, in a vast arc that culminated in the noble outlines of Kolahoi. And as I looked upon this great scene, a horseman came pricking across the downs at a good speed, and climbing up to the height upon which I stood revealed the features of the fine fellow I had talked with before my tent. He was in search he said of a pony that had strayed, and seeing me he had come to say farewell.—His tall form seated well in the saddle, while with one hand he sheltered his eyes as he searched the horizon for his missing animal,—the whole bulk and grandeur of Haramukh behind him—made a superb picture, as of some Bedawin who had migrated from his desert sands to this world of glaciers and fields of snow.

He bade me adieu and galloped off upon his quest.

Once more the horizon was void of life, as climbing a massive down that was like a whale with a white dorsal fin of snow, I descended to the bed of the stream that flowed between it and its neighbour across the valley. There,

were no trees here and the landscape was grey and forlorn, with barren mountains splashed with snow encircling it in the direction of my advance. It may be as we are told that all impressions of nature are illusive, and that we project the thoughts of our own minds upon the world about us; yet the woodlands always seem to me as much alive, as this grey world about the slopes of Haramukh seemed to me dead and miserable; the scene of some great tragedy.

The '*Morne plaine*' of Victor Hugo kept coming to my lips. . . .

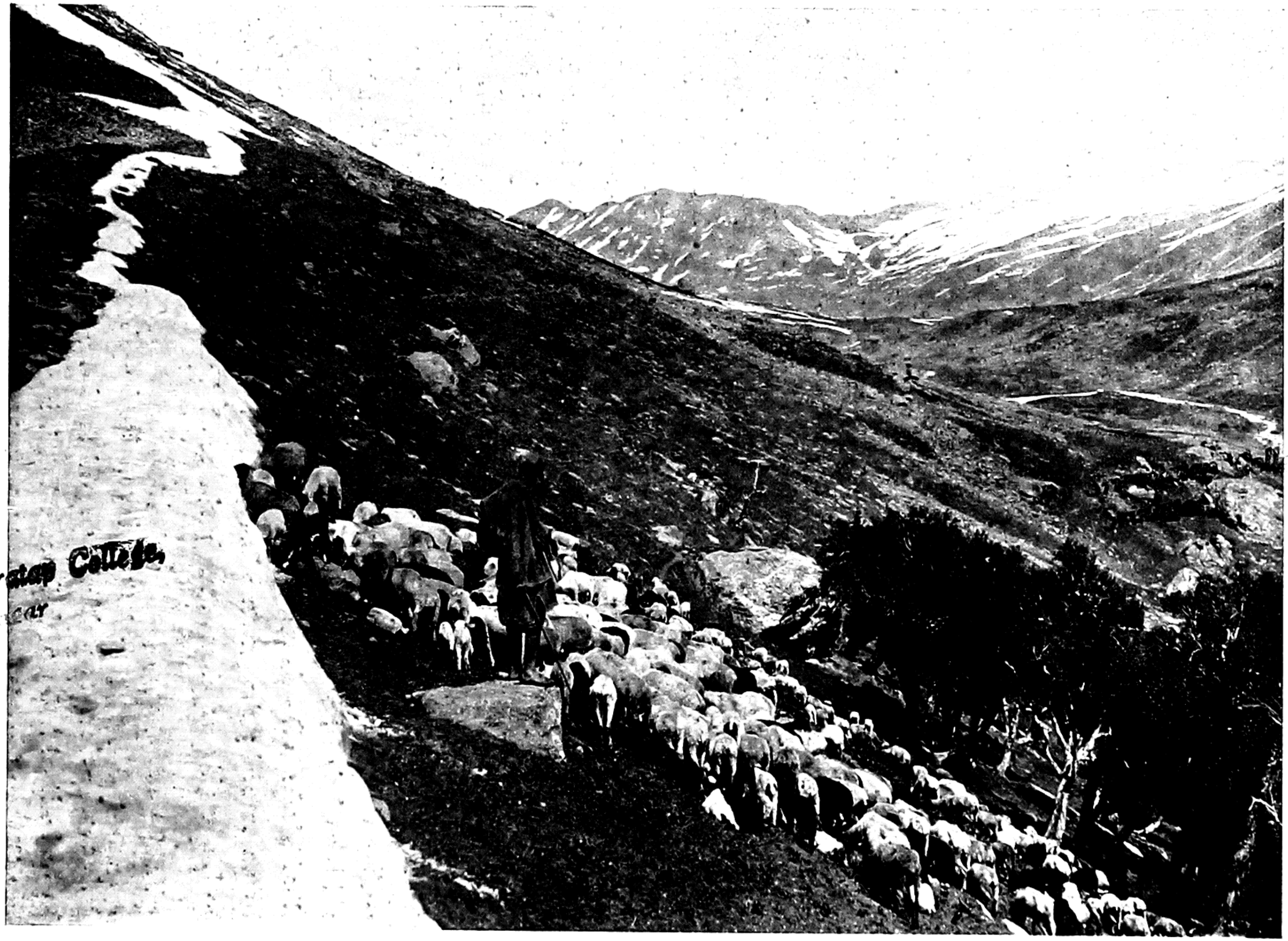
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The scene was changed with dramatic swiftness as I reached the summit of the next ridge, for from there under its dorsal line of snow, I found a thousand sheep, moving as one across the sunlit grass to the shouts and cries of the shepherds and their wives; while below them shimmering in the breeze there spread a forest of birch trees, green with the splendour of the spring. Far down at the bottom of the valley murmured a silver stream, spanned at intervals by a still surviving arch of snow, and as I followed its winding course, I saw that it came swiftly down from the heights beyond me, and passed under the beauty of the Birch woods to the shadowy velvet of the valley below. It was the Kankanai. And here again the splendour of Haramukh rose up with an almost conscious arrogance far above the world of detailed beauty at his feet.

The Head-shepherd upon seeing me came hastening to where I stood, and lifting his voice high in lamentation threw himself prostrate at my feet.

"Justice! Justice!" he called out, "Woe! Woe!; the Gujars have beaten me, they have carried off my blankets by force, and the bridles of my ponies," and with this he set to and began beating himself violently about the face, while the tears streamed down his unwashed cheeks.

Thus I learnt that in these far uplands might is right, that here as the saying goes 'The Mountain is the magistrate and the Pine is the policeman,' and that in the battle for these pasture lands the weaker or the less brave go to the wall. According to the Gujar who has recently built a summer hut in the forests, all these grazing grounds are his, and the Chaupan is a trespasser to be beaten and evicted by violent means. According to the Chaupan,



THE FIRST FLOCK OF THE YEAR.

the Gujar is a foreign intruder upon his ancestral pastures, and a brute who resorts to force in defiance of what is right. The White Man who appears over the rim of the horizon, is thus converted upon the instant into a Court of Appeal.

From these scenes of rivalry and theatrical despair, I came once more to the deep solitudes of Nature; but here enwrapped in loveliness, for at the next rise the little lake of Nund Kol lay before me, translucent, edged with flowers, and flecked with ice-floes; yet a mirror for the splendour of Haramukh and his superb descending cataracts of ice.

And here my tent was pitched, its very floor carpeted with flowers, upon which it had been unfeeling—'*bé dardi*' as the Emperor Jahangir observed upon a like occasion—to have spread a carpet.

The Lake is a long narrow water shaped like an hour-glass. Upon the south it is bordered by one of those great dorsal fins which reach out from the base of Haramukh into the valley, and is here enveloped in snow, save where the lateral ribs of rock descending to the lake show black against its whiteness. At the Lake's back there is the whole stupendous mass of Haramukh and his falling glaciers. Its northern bounds are free from snow, and of a velvet green where the young grass is shooting forth. Upon the east the surplus of the lake finds an exit over a bar into the stream of the Kankanai.

* * *

It is while sitting here absorbed in this view that spreads before me from under the flap of my tent, that I am invited by the God of Travel to look upon a scene of astonishing charm and originality; something that I have never seen before; for as the day advances, the shepherds and their flocks driven by the wrath of their enemies embark upon an exodus, and I am to witness their passage of the waters. They have come slowly after me over the great ridges, their sheep bleating, their lambs filling the air with cries, their dogs barking, and their women afoot; and they have travelled so far without mishap. But here they are stayed by the shining waters of the Lake, and the violence and depth of the stream that leaves it to fall into the roaring valley. One by one they come to a pause and assemble

in distress upon a bare promontory, uncertain how to proceed. The shepherds decide that the stream cannot be forded, and that the only course is to make the wide circuit of the lake. And thus for the space of three hours the scene is enacted before me.

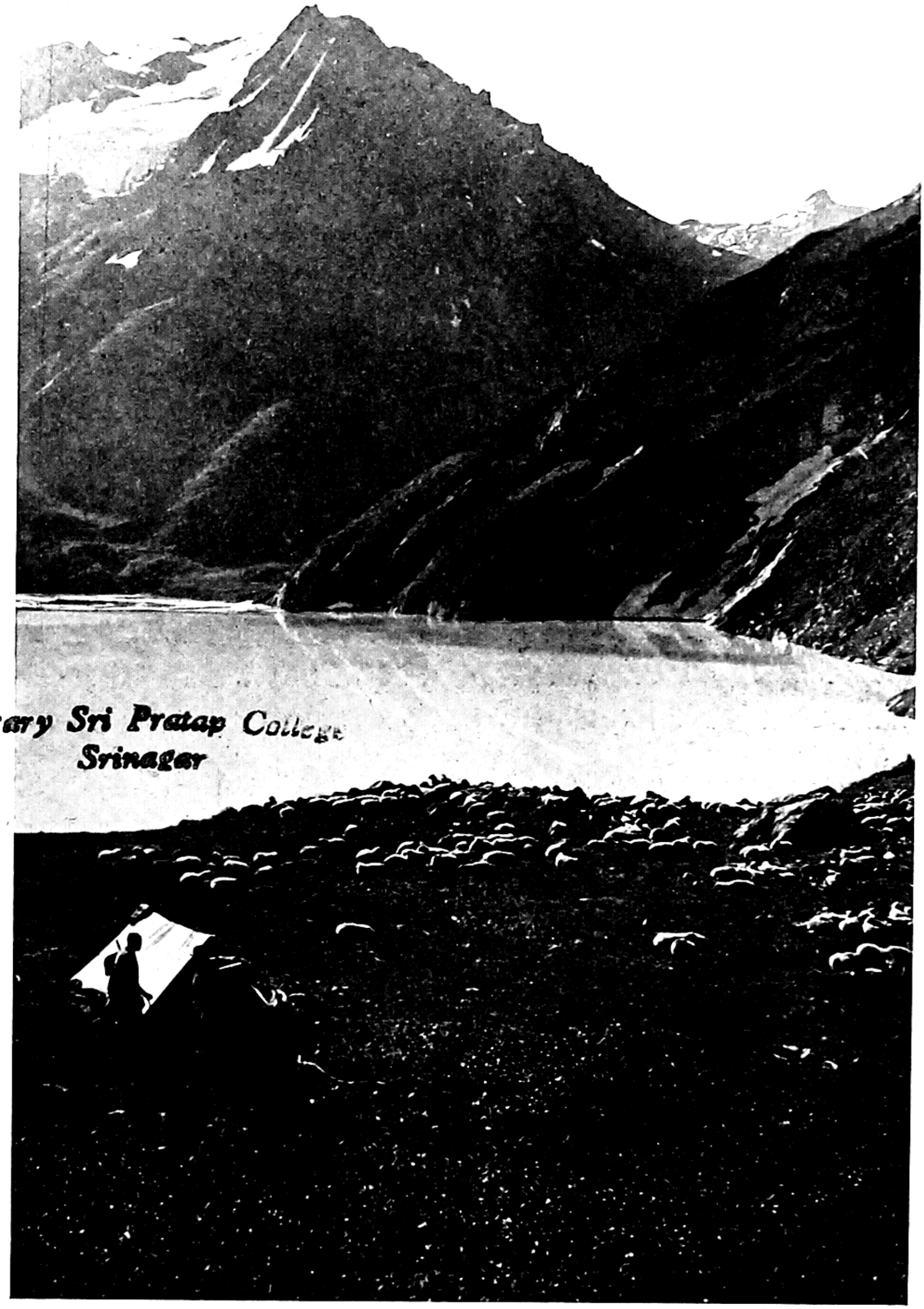
Slowly the flock moves forward in single file, ever lengthening across the white lustre of the snow, furrowing its smooth surface; the picture of a beaten and evicted people. Where the grass grows under the ribs of rock and the birch trees cluster, there they wait and cluster together, the bolder complacent, the more timid with their necks bent low, and their noses laid in dejection against the wall of snow. The shepherds coming up induce them with many cries to move forward, and so they pass on once more in a single line across the snow fans which fall from the glacier's edge to the waters of the Lake. They look here like ants upon a white surface, and so numerous are they that their leading files have accomplished the circuit before the last of the flock where it took shelter by the birch trees have begun to move.

Above these humble creatures, which seem conscious of trespassing into the midst of cold and terrible arcana, there towers up into heaven a mountain seventeen thousand feet in height, the home of a God, whose majestic head is crowned with perpetual snow. One breath of his wrath would scatter them and fling them into the ice-cold waters, upon whose calm the floes and bergs sail with a serene indifference. Every incident—the moving flock, the falling cataracts of ice—is faithfully mirrored in the surface of the Lake.

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The flock had passed in safety and were at grass upon the lush meadows where the primulas and the buttercups bloom, when the day turned, and the sunlit morning became enveloped in the clouds and thunders of evening. Haramukh above his glaciers was veiled in tragic forms which climbed up and encompassed him about like an invading army. I felt that here were epic contests, and the strivings of a world of which I had no more than a surface impression.

Near at hand a big stream from Gungabal came raging over boulders



THE FLOCK AT PEACE.

and gigantic rocks, and the sound of its action was like a base undertone to which the life of this valley was attuned; while beyond it with a greater pomp and mystery of sound was heard the blowing of the storm high up amidst the caverns and pinnacled recesses of the mountain.

The Lake itself was but the humble slave of the God, the reflection of his moods; now a sheet of silver in which his grey ribs and sun-clad summits were imaged; now an angry water driven by dark and mysterious passions; and yet again a leaden and sombre thing, with no ray of joy or life upon its face.

* *
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As night approached, I left the shelter of my tent to look about me. How great was the change from the sunlight and splendour of the morning! Great gulfs of mist were moving up the valley as from a cauldron, and the edges of the clouds hung low and brooding over the little lake, hidden almost completely now from sight. The soil under my feet as I walked towards Gungabal was spongy with the winter snow and wet with rain, and the sentiment of what I looked upon from the ridge above my tent, was of a world that was emerging, but was scarcely yet emerged, from an earlier state.

Gungabal spread gloomy and dark before me, and at one end his overflow formed the stream that was thundering down to the lower water. The sodden earth was streaked with layers and folds of snow. Under the lea of a large boulder the shepherds were seated, three men and three women—the youngest of these a girl of striking and almost classical beauty, in a faded pink robe that may have been her wedding gown. They sat here heedless of the rain and the soaking earth beneath their feet. In a large cauldron a lamb was seething, the property of some anxious farmer in the vale. Across the stream where it emerged from Gungabal, two more shepherds were crossing to collect the flock amidst the snow and mists of the mountain side. It was a scene of strange and savage desolation.

"Cold impenetrable regions, where the snow never melts, nor disappears."

Alberūnī.

LAKE LAND



CHAPTER XV

THE FROZEN WATERS

THE rain made a sad night of it, but at dawn and for a brief hour after, the little lake of Nund Kol, which I had left wrapped in mystery and a chill reticent gloom, became a thing of radiant beauty. The morning sunlight played fitfully on it, and it smiled, a creature of infantile lovelines, radiant in exquisite harmonies, of white and silver where the glaciers of Haramukh were mirrored on its surface; of silk-like greens where the meadows on its western shore reached down to its waters. Under the impulse of the morning breeze the ice-floes were sailing across it in a fairy procession; some of them like bergs of crystal purified of every taint. The sunlight played on the snow-fields and cataracts of the mountain with a joyous effect, that was heightened by the impenetrable gloom of his summits; and at my feet as I stood rejoicing at the elfin scene before me, there blossomed by the edge of the Lake and its moving ships of ice, a small field of the most vivid flowers, but newly come to birth.

I took my way to Gungabal, and there, upon a promontory, above its outflowing waters, I found the whole flock of two thousand sheep, whose exodus and circuit of the little lake had so engrossed my attention the previous day, assembled, bleating and moving restlessly, as though awaiting their orders for the day.

Nor were these long in coming. The old shepherd and his pretty women disengaged themselves from the flock, and forded the river across to where I was standing; while the younger shepherds whistling and calling to their sheep moved off like a cloud to the upland pastures. I knew not upon which of these groups to bestow my principal attention; the flock in its multitudinous beauty moving against the marvellous background

of glaciers and the organ-like pillars of the mountain, or the women, followed by a single ewe, slowly crossing the blue and sparkling river whose waters circled and played about their knees. For it was as though some one had given a signal for the scene of almost still life, which met my gaze as I came over the crest of the hill, to break up into the most lively and enchanting beauty in movement.

It was with a sigh of regret that I turned away at last on the completion of these leisured scenes, to the fulfilment of my journey. My path now lay along the edge of Gungabal, and from there rapidly passed up the steep side of the mountain, from which the whole circuit and environment of the lake were visible. It seemed to my fancy like Garda in miniature, with its low shores at one end and its fiord of deep blue water at the other; and more than once as I stopped in my climb to look down upon the end of the lake, I was reminded of that incomparable Italian water. Yet how great were the differences which marked this similarity; one, a little mountain tarn, white upon its floor with dead men's bones, and wrapped in solitudes that weigh almost painfully upon the spirit; the other endeared to one by so many human and cherished associations, the home of Catullus and of Vergil; one, for all its littleness, ennobled by the overshadowing majesty of one of the great mountains of the world, the dread home of a God; the other, for all its sea-like expanse and tumult of waters, bordered by heights which however beautiful and inspiring, rise to little more than a thousand feet! I could not help wishing—since it is in such desires that Art is born—that I could rearrange some of these natural scenes; by adding to the Italian lake the splendours of Haramukh, and to this secret Himalayan water some touch of human emotion.

As I looked down upon Gungabal and its slate-blue hues, I was charmed once more by the passage across it of the ice-floes, and I could see from this vantage point, how, in advance of each floe and berg as it was driven by the breeze behind it, there was a passage way of calm upon the rippling surface of the lake. My attention was rather drawn to these lesser beauties, from the fact that the morning was by now heavily overcast with clouds, behind which I could only faintly discern the superb panorama of icy-peaks and mountain chains which, upon a more fortunate occasion, must have

greeted my eyes. As it was, the mists came drifting down the mountain-side enveloping me, and my last impression of Gungabal was of a grey sadness, over which a pair of cuckoos went flying, singing their woodland notes, till they also were engulfed in the fathomless mist.

Thus might the souls of lovers be swept into the dread mists of Acheron.

I was by now far up the mountain, plodding slowly through the snow which still lay in masses upon it, when I came upon Lolgool, white, solitary, and still as death. No bird sang here, no flowers had yet begun to bloom, no tree nor shrub nor patch of grass graced its borders. No life moved within its precincts. The snow swept down to its rim in sheets and folds of Whiteness. Yet the sentiment was not of Death but of life held in suspense ; the legend of the Sleeping Beauty.

A fortnight earlier there could have been no hint of an awakening ; but at the moment of my visit, there were visible, when the first impression had worn away, faint signs and traces of coming life. The central whiteness of the pool was marked with circles and sweeping curves, where the icy mass was breaking up, and upon its fringe it was manifest that Winter was reluctantly yielding his grip. The ice here had broken from its moorings, and the ivory surface of the lake was ringed about with a narrow border that was half ice, half pale clear water ; while at the far end, where its surplus seeks an exit in mid-summer, there was an open pool of exquisite lustre in which I could trace at once the stones and pebbles of its floor, and the snow-white forms of the mountains that were imaged in it.

The sky was grey and overcast, and the white mists enclosed the arena of the lake, now blowing down to its edge and half concealing its beauty, now lifting as though to display it ; while here and there the still, opaque, sheets and masses of snow gleamed with a sudden and burnished radiance as of silver, where the light of Day was concentrated for an instant through the lifting mists.

I turned from this unlooked-for scene, devoid of all human associations, and climbed up the steep and difficult path to the summit of the hill before me, to find there a wall that wandered across the Col from crest to crest, with a manifest fear as of Someone who was seeking to enter from without.

It would seem in truth that in by-gone days this wall served some purpose of defence: that men with hearts beating crouched behind it, looking for those who would come over this roof of the world, to ravage the smiling vale behind, that men died here, that the crimson and white were mingled, and that Lolgool carried the burden of the dead.

The view that met me on reaching the crest of the Col was in startling contrast with that which I had left behind. For at the foot of the great snow slide that swept a thousand feet below me, there spread a blue-green valley full of birch trees, with dark enclosing mountains about it, and a view of peak after peak to the crowning summit of all; the far-famed Nanga Parbat.

It seemed as though I had naught to do now but glide upon the snow, and follow the emerging river into the beauties of the valley. But I was soon to find that the principal difficulties of my journey still lay before me.

The Snow lay soft and deep under foot, truculent, engulfing; and it all but swallowed for ever the unfortunate pony who accompanied me. It was with no little difficulty that he was extricated from its toils, only to fall into them once more, after, with trembling limbs, he had travelled a short way. This process was continued, until we eventually reached a grassy knoll where I stopped to rest, but there were moments when he lay helpless in the snow and unable to move, and when it seemed that his life must come to an end. He appeared to be unaware however of his escape, for he fell-to without delay upon the grass.

I passed an hour here upon this island, looking down, on the one hand, upon Sirbal white with ice, but a week or two nearer his escape from the rigours of winter than Lolgool; and upon his pools which mirrored with a crystal definition the glaciers and masses of rock above him. For a brief space also I could trace the little stream which bore away his surplus waters, sparkling over the pebbles, only to fall once more in its descent under the dominion of the snow. Upon my other hand I could see these waters emerging and flowing across a small oval plain, that was in its time also a lake; but is now become a meadow, marshy in places, beautiful in others with flowers and the loops and curves of the meandering stream. Here was the Vale of

Kashmir in miniature and the winding course of the Vetasta perfectly exemplified.

I spent here a blissful hour of repose after the strivings of the forenoon; while a little lark singing above Sirbal was the only creature that had life in the vast circle of the world about me.

I had fancied when I reached the Col and looked down upon the blue-green valley below me that all that remained for me was to go down to it and accompany it on its way; but I soon found that this was not the case. For this was not the Erin valley for which I was bound, but another, and my road lay up a steep and precipitous ascent to another pass some fourteen thousand feet in height. Far in the distance like flies upon its white wall I could see my coolies creeping with their loads, and all else about me was a silent and snow-covered world.

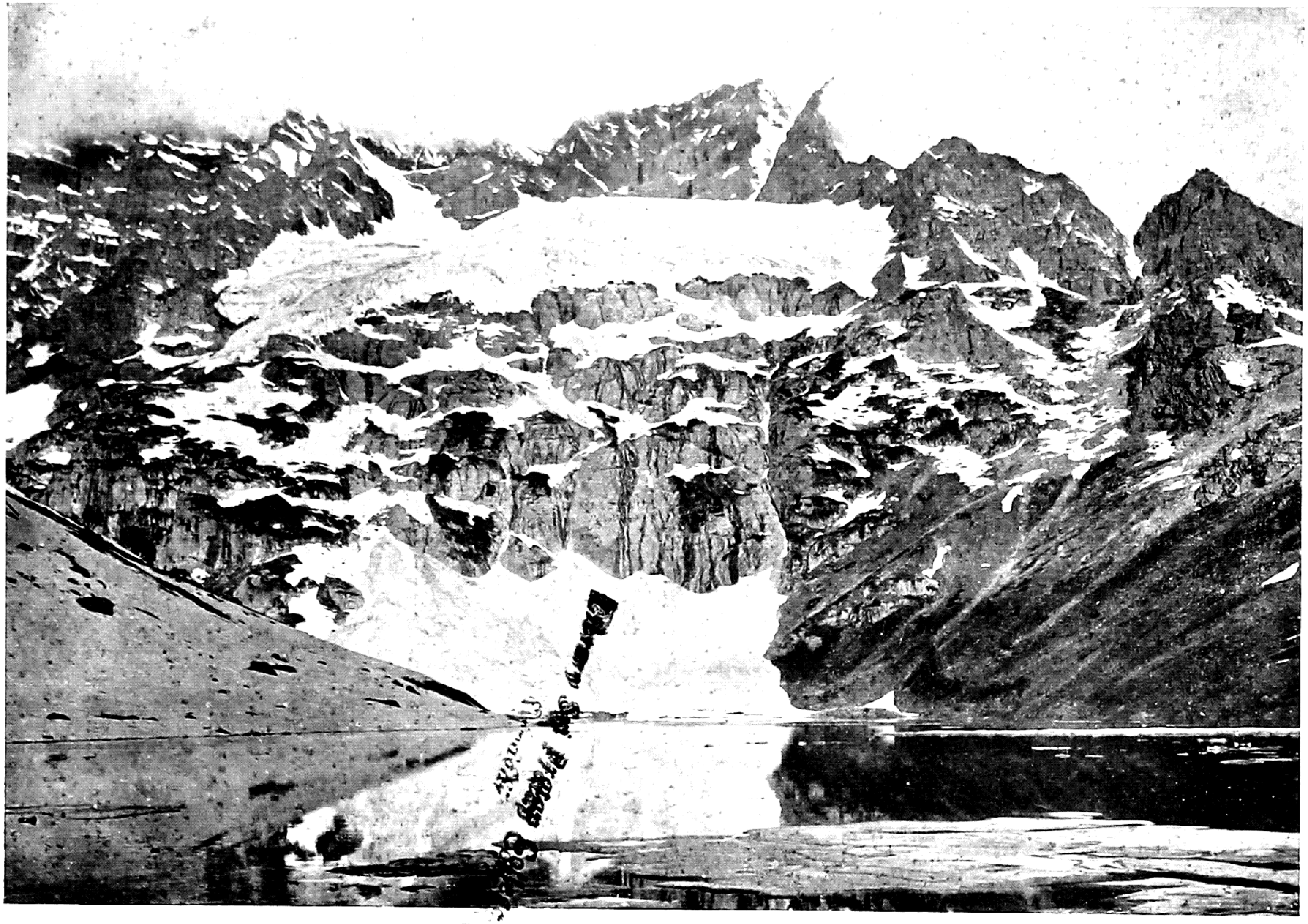
I faced this new climb with reluctance, and I found it best to follow without looking up towards the summit of the Pass, the footsteps of those who had gone before me, and were now lost to sight. Yet the slow plugging toil of the ascent was lightened for me by the exceeding beauty of the snow, where it came from the great shoulders of Haramukh, tumbling a thousand feet in dome-like cascades and fountains of perfect form. Its surface was wrought into millions of fine lines furrowed by the recent rain, and into ridges where the wind and sun had played. Here also were miniature tarns that still lay helpless in the grasp of winter, and I wondered if even at the height of summer they ever saw the sky.

When at length I reached the Col up to which I had climbed for two hours, and saw before me the straight wall of some twenty feet of snow which marked its summit, I once more fancied that I should look from it upon a land of Canaan smiling upon its other side; but all that I saw was a grey and bottomless pit of mist that seemed to have its birth in the very bowels of the world.

The ridge was like a knife, and from it the snow fell almost vertically down into this misty void. Down this strange place out of which there came like voices from the nether world, the cries of the coolies, we descended foot by foot, now down the perilous shaly slope, now upon the

sliding snow, until, exhausted by the long day's way-faring we reached the green and level vale of Chitridur. We had been twelve hours on the march.

Here set about with birch woods that were splashed with snow, and enclosed upon all sides, save one, by the great heights from which we had come, spread a scene of pastoral beauty. Across the peaty levels of the vale, a river wandered in loops and curves, herds of ponies and brood mares grazed, and flocks of white sheep flecked the grassy slopes. Here were reproduced for me the sights and scenes of the Pla des Abeillans, that one-time lake in the high Pyrenees that is now a level of turf, the haunt of browsing cattle and of a meandering stream. The same causes have produced here the same result.



THE BREAKING OF THE ICE AT NUND KOL.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ERIN VALLEY

My camp was pitched by some freak of my people, three miles below the Vale of Chitridur, where there are some Gujar huts, the first habitations of the valley. But these were not yet occupied, and I had the mountain-side to myself. Upon the soil where my tent was placed, there grew in abundance the little but lovely purple flag, and a sort of black tulip. Beyond these from my tent-door spread the valley, rapidly descending through dark woods to the Wular lake, of which in the soft evening light, and under the lifting clouds, I had an enticing vision. Beside me thundered the river, eager, impetuous, green in its pools, white with foam in its cataracts. Upon the farther bank there was a multitude of Birch trees, prostrate under the assaults of winter, and nearer at hand upon a slope that was sheltered by dark cypress-like firs, was a field of white Rhododendrons, fluttering in the breeze. An armful of them strung together like a garland was brought by Mahamdoo and suspended before my tent; and there they revolved, displaying their pink and white beauty and their mottled grace.

They were something of a solace too, for the sky overhead was grey with clouds, and a fine continuous rain, that was worthy of the dear island whose name the Valley bears, hid its vistas.

The night was dull and wet, and the morning unpromising. We set out at noon down the valley; but the rain fell with a deadly obstinacy, and the footpath down the steep hill-side became all but impracticable. We slipped and floundered upon its clayey surface, moving patiently foot by foot; and each moment our burdens became heavier with the mud and the rain.

Upon the great snowy uplands there was beauty and danger; and in

a snow-storm there is always the possibility of death; but rain—such rain as this—is like the lesser troubles of life, which wear upon the spirit without rousing it to battle.

We arrived a sodden and dejected fraternity at Kodoora, the first hamlet in the Erin valley. But here the sun broke upon us with a splendid glow, the lane of sky above the valley became blue, and we pursued our journey to the village of Sunt Mula, to find shelter there, and peace.

With the passing of the rain there came also the added charm of human associations and human effort. The track which higher up had made our progress so wearisome, smoothened and widened itself as we went. Easements in the form of little bridges spanned the brooks we had to cross; willows, walnuts, and slim young poplars added their grace to the dark natural wood-land, and at Kodoora a *Ziarat*, or place of prayer, spoke of man's strivings after communion with his God, and by its beauty and grace of his love of craftsmanship. It had a sweet rural charm of its own, with its balcony projecting over the millet fields, and its roof of green grass; yet by one coming up the valley from great centres, it might have been passed unnoticed. To us who came upon it from tracts where Nature, cold and menacing, scarce permits the presence of man, it was touching in its whisper of the Soul.

Kodoora is the home of Gujars or cattle-herds, who within the past dozen years have settled at this far end of the valley. At Sunt Mula one is in Kashmir, and the types of the houses, the faces and forms of the men and women, the very character of the people, are manifestly unlike those at Kodoora two miles above. It is more than a surface distinction; for centuries of custom and tradition, and differences of race that are many thousands of years old, separate these people from each other.



THE SHEPHERD

CHAPTER XVII

CONCLUSION OF THE JOURNEY

AND now my journey in the mountains is at an end. It is noon, and I am at peace with the world, in a Mulberry grove whose fruit draws here the Golden Orioles. Now and then one flies like a billow of gold in the sunlight, from one tree to another; now and then the slumberous silence is broken by the liquid music of his note. From afar off, faintly, like voices from another land, comes the refrain of the Weeders in the rice-fields as they work and sing in unison. . . .

A breeze from Paradise blows through the branches of the trees, tempering the noon. . . . . .

My journey is over, and in the sunlight yonder gleams the Wular, a purple water. Beyond it my roving eyes can trace green fields and woods, and the high azure and silver of the Pir Pantsal, which I have scarce looked upon for a month.

The bees are humming, and half asleep I enjoy the repose of the wayfarer, the tranquil grace of a summer's day.

Now and then the people pass; a lad with some sheep; a man upon his travels. . . . Simulacra of reality. What are they to me?

* *
*

Crossing the Wular. The boat moves through symphonies of mauve, pursuing its placid timeless voyage across the satin water, where clouds and mountains dream, and ponies wallow amidst lush meadows and marshes, knee-deep amidst a blaze of flowers. Here is a carpet of gold under the

purple mountains, and herons lazily flapping their wings as they fly. Here the lake terns flit in their pied velvet jackets and sweeping tails amidst the water-lilies, and the carrion eagles loom like islands above the expanse of water. The surface of the Lake is a mirror, but with a pattern of its own, where the *singaras* lie like lace upon its surface. The fishermen, lifting their shining nets, fling the hapless fish that have been raped from the shallows, to die in the cruel lustre of the sun. The island of Zain-ul-abi-Din, with its ruins hidden under the wild vine, speaks of forgotten kings and days reverted to the womb of time. Somewhere in the deeps there is a city, like the doomed city of Ys, now lost to the sight of men. . . .

From things like these we pass to open water, and I am led to think that there is no life like this silken life upon the waters of the valley. Half do I regret that I ever left my House-boat for the hard road and the upland toil of the mountains.

For *this* is Kashmir.

See the clouds, changing from moment to moment as they climb the stairways of Heaven, throwing their shadows on the sun-lit blue of the mountains, now white and opalescent as they expand, now grey and sombre as they fill with rain above the silver crests of Apharwat.

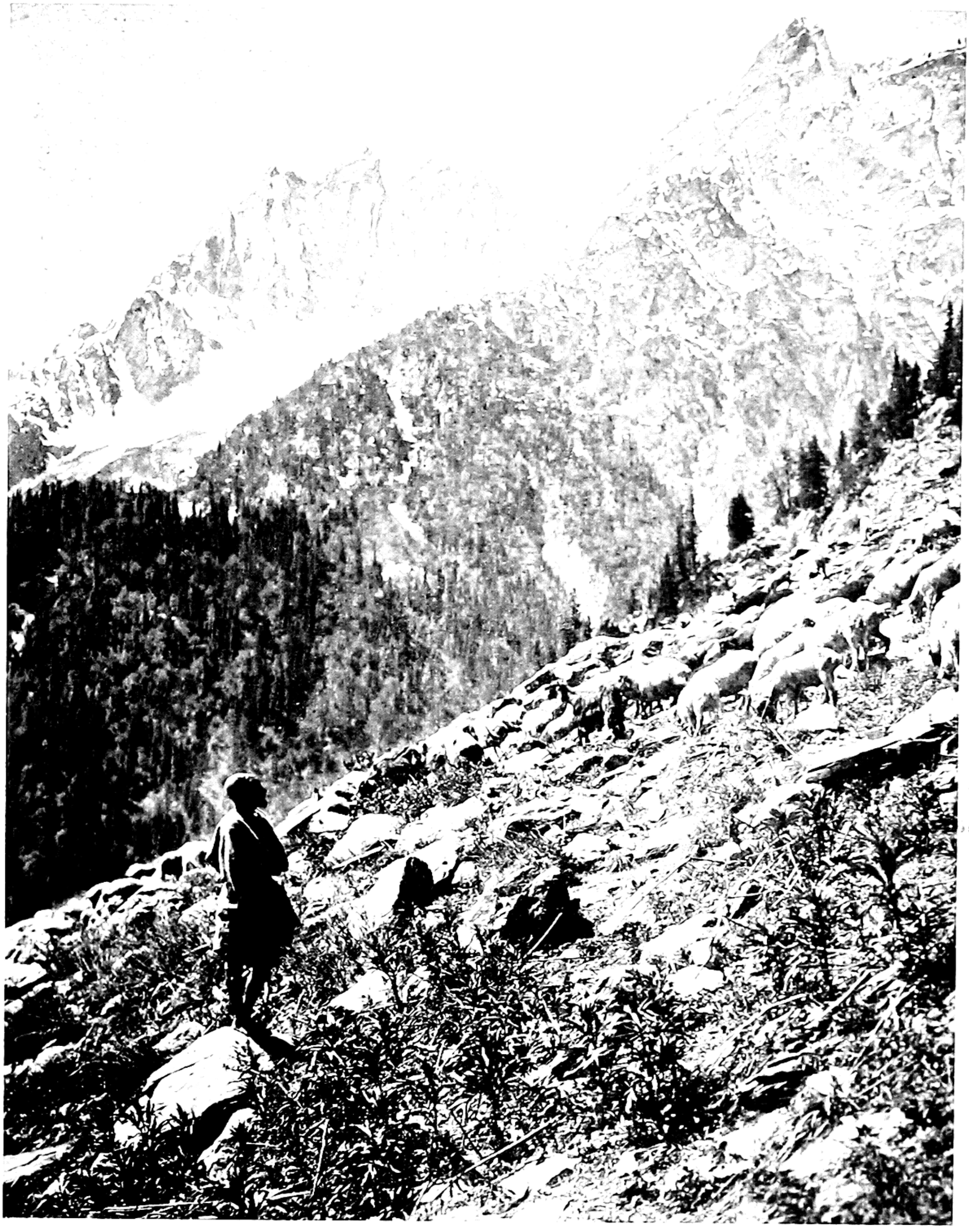
See the long avenues of the far Highway, where the world passes as in a dream; the boats laden with people as they cross from shore to shore, the cattle lowing to the plash of oars, the images of trees upon the shining fringes of the lake, the patriarchal Chinar and the virginal Willow.

See how the great storms gather and blow upon the mighty uplands, while here the gentle breeze kisses the up-turned face of the water.

This is the subtle, elusive, silken life of Kashmir.

This it is which makes the Happy Valley "the Paradise of the Indies." Voluptuous and beautiful, a gliding dream; a land for lovers; a land in which man can be happy, heedless of the hours, of the thronging World; a land that is for ever whispering through its zephyrs, its wavelets on the waters, of love and dalliance and the careless enjoyment of life. Such is Kashmir.

The mountains beckon through the sun-haze, and the silver snows call the dwellers of the valley to their immortal company as of the Gods assembled; but they say



MOUNTAIN PASTURES.

"No! our lot is here; here will we live in perpetual ease, in the slumberous passion and enjoyment of life. Neither toil nor striving are for us, for here is the fulfilment of Desire."

Finis

Have conversation with the wind that goes
Bearing a pack of loveliness and pain :
The Golden exultation of the grain
And the last, sacred whisper of the Rose.

Abu'l-Ala.

EPILOGUE

In the preceding pages I have tried to describe the beauty and the charm of Kashmir. I have not aimed at writing a comprehensive account of this wonderful valley, that is unique in the world; or of the great mountains which encircle it; or of its tragic history and vicissitudes; or of the people whose home it has been from immemorial days. Nor have I wished to depict any more than I saw them, the shadows which darken the picture of its grace. To some of them I have closed my eyes, as one closes them, if one is wise, to the infirmities of those one loves. Yet I would not have it thought that in this paradise there is no grief or sordidness or pain, for that would be untrue to its life, as to that of all created things.

Alas! if the record of Kashmir be read aright, it is a moving tale, of human infirmity, of human sins; and there are not many races in the world upon whom the hand of Fate has been laid so heavily as upon those who inhabit this, perhaps the fairest corner of the earth.

Kashmir in truth has paid the price of beauty, that 'fatal gift' of which the poets have sung from early time; and she has paid it an hundred fold. Those who have lived here have fallen under her caresses as men fell of old under the wiles of Circe; and those without, born under a ruder heaven, have coveted her joys with a fierce desire, and have seized upon her treasuries with unstinted hand. It is under the stress of such events that the character of her people has been evolved; and it is a character that is not noble or beautiful, though deserving of sympathy and help from those who have had a happier destiny. There have been times when the life of a man in this land has been held of little more value than the life of a dog; when the fairest of its women—and its women have long been renowned for their beauty—have been carried off not once or twice but generation

after generation " to fill the *bagnios* and the harems " of Hindustan. Neither their lives, nor their property, nor their honour have been left to this unfortunate people in the past.

It is only of late, within the present generation and within the past few years, that the clouds have lifted and that they have begun to raise their heads from the dust of centuries of oppression; and though they know that this change has really come and is like to stay, they cannot yet in their hearts believe in its duration. Children of light and of a land beautiful beyond the dreams of ordinary men, a profound sadness is visible in their eyes, and in the workings of their spirit; and a great fear still lingers in their hearts. This fear is extraordinary in its manifestations; it assails men of gigantic frame and energy, and I have myself wondered to see such an one tremble all over his body (as a thorough-bred hunter may be seen quivering by the covert-side when hounds are at work on a winter's morning; but with how different an emotion!) at the sound of an angry voice. Such a fear and such memories, of necessity provoke qualities of character and temperament upon which those whose past has been happier, are prone to look down with anger and a measureless contempt; but even in these respects, a marked difference is visible even to a careless eye, between the people of the fields and hamlets, and those of the city, and between the former in their intercourse with each other, and in their intercourse with those who are of the State, or who come with an air of power and authority into their midst.

Beautiful also as is the country, its beauty is marred by some of the habits of the people, by dirt and physical neglect. Even the beauty of the women is hidden for the most part under sombre and unattractive garments, as though experience had taught the race the virtue of concealment. Whether from this or from other causes, even the existence of this famous beauty is questioned by many observers.

"It is difficult," as some one has said, "for a woman to be beautiful"; and it has been made very difficult for her in Kashmir.

Certainly the men are often strikingly handsome; and there are no children in the world with brighter eyes or prettier faces than those of the valley of Kashmir.

The farmers and country people, since Sir Walter Lawrence's settlement and the completion of the Gilgit Road—that *via dolorosa* upon which so many hearts were broken—have come into the natural prosperity that awaits any settler upon so bountiful a soil ; but there is still much and even acute poverty and misery in the City, which in by-gone days battened upon the country-side. Disease also is yet unevicted ; and from time to time Cholera sweeps through the valley, and fills the hearts of the people with gloom. But the day is near at hand when such miseries will have ceased, as indeed they have already been greatly diminished under the ministration of unselfish souls.

Happy as my own stay in Kashmir was, it was not without its griefs. I will record but two, lest the preceding narrative should partake too much of the colour of the rose. The one was a tragedy—for it affected me in that way—which befell a way-side place in the interval between my arrival in the valley and my departure. This place bore the name of Chinari, because of the beauty of its great Planes, the first the traveller was wont to see in Kashmir. They stood one upon each side of the road, and under their shadow there had grown up a small bazaar of little wooden houses, with the charm of a mountain hamlet, and of a way-side place that had existed from the leisured age of the Emperors. It was, I thought, the most attractive stage on the long road into Kashmir. I looked for it eagerly, therefore, upon my return ; when, as the Motor turned the corner, I found that it had disappeared from existence. The little houses with their oriels and verandahs were a heap of ashes, and the great chinars, once so stately, rose into the air, gaunt and lifeless, the very skeletons of departed beauty.

And the other incident—indeed I feel some hesitation in mentioning it at all—took me at Baramulla as I was leaving the valley. For there, by the still face of the river, along its high embankment, there walked a slight figure, with a black mantilla over her silvery head, and about her like an aureole the inalienable grace of an English gentle-woman. She walked a little feebly, resting with her innocent air upon the arm of a native servant, and as I approached she flushed a little, at the thought I suppose of addressing

a stranger—and I could see that grief was upon her, for with all her high grace and courage, her lips trembled—and she said :—

"I beg your pardon, sir; but have you—perhaps—as you come from Srinagar—seen the last list of Casualties from the Dardanelles ?"

"You see," she added wistfully, "my son—my youngest—is there. My eldest boy was killed in Flanders. . . . I have come up here because I have been ill, and the Doctors advised the quiet of Kashmir."

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